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WINTER ISSUE

5¢

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OUTLAW WORLD

A Captain Future Novel

By EDMOND HAMILTON

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N OF SPACE

f Fame Story

HUYLER MILLER

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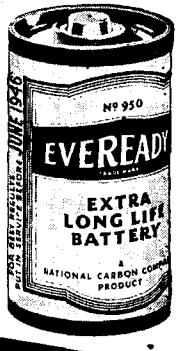

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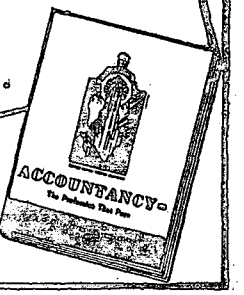

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Vol. 13, No. 1 CONTENTS Winter, 1946

A Complete Captain Future Novel

OUTLAW WORLD

By

EDMOND HAMILTON

On the trail of malevolent space pirates, Curt Newton and the Futuremen combat the evil machinations of the Uranian Ru Ghur, who plans the total destruction of the Universe! 11

Short Stories

THE FORGOTTEN MAN OF SPACE ..... P. Schuyler Miller 66
A Hall of Fame Classic reprinted by popular demand

THE JIMSON ISLAND GIANT ..... Sam Merwin, Jr. 77
Duplex had a formula—but could not foresee its consequences

Special Features

THE ETHER VIBRATES ..... Announcements and Letters 6
THE FUTUREMEN ..... Grag's Pet, the Moon-Pup 75
THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW ..... Vulcan, the Hollow World 80
REVIEW OF FAN PUBLICATIONS ..... Sergeant Saturn 92
MEET THE AUTHOR ..... Edmond Hamilton 95

Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "Outlaw World"

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December, 1945 issue.

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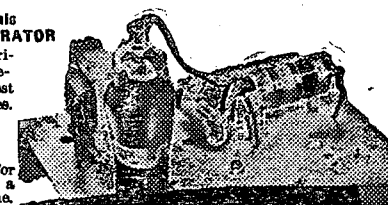

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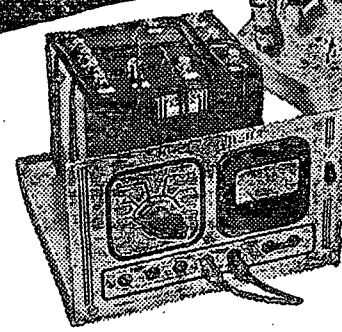

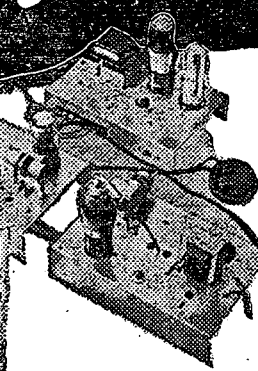

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CALIFORNIA, here we come! Batten down the space ports, Frogeyes! Remove the atomic charges from the atom-bombs, Wart-ears, and load them up with incendiary 5,000 octane Xeno. Citizens of Alameda, be warned. Snaggletooth, blazon this message in the western skies—

Depart, ye residents of this twentieth century Sodom, and hit one Roger Rehm over the head with a baseball bat before leaving. Stake him out in the public square. The Sarge is about to zoom out of space—praise Allah! He's out of Xeno—and erase Alameda from the map. No city which has reared such a monster can be spared for the sake of space.

And for the sake of same, ye Sarge will get down to facts. Far out at the rim of the Galaxy, a thing—no other word can describe it—unveiled itself slowly on the telecaster screen.

Wart-ears fainted and red foam bubbled from his lobes. Snaggletooth screamed and fell into the Xeno vat when he saw it and on emerging his fumes fuzed one of the port rocket tubes. Frogeyes merely goggled—he's been good for little else since. As for ye Sarge—well, take a look at it for yourselves.

So someone finally discovered this old space dog's difficulty in keeping on a Jovian equine. All right! But to display to the universe shamelessly that he has to make himself part of the horse to stay aboard is base ingratitude. What's that, Snaggie, old tooth? You say the artist—*artist*, my tendril!—might have made me another part of the horse.

Stuff him with Mercurian scallions, Frogeyes, and hang him outside the ship! But what ye Sarge really wants to know is who told him about the derby hat—and who are those other gremlins. Stop pouting, Wart-ears. You know you look a little like a gremlin.

As if this were not enough to justify wiping out Alameda, this infidilic Rehm has added injury to insult in the form of the following—

Beloved Sarge: Enclosed is a lot of garbage to compensate for the shortage of drawings of ye Sarge. Now, Sarge, can you look the fans straight in the eye and tell them that monstrosity on the Fall, 1945, ish of SS is a representation of an stf cover? By the Wobber and mighty Pov, why did we get such a letdown after the Summer ish. And by the way what's Jerry Colonna doing in the lower right hand corner? Quick, Wart-ears, the Xeno! The Sarge has fainted.

After reviving the Sarge we look into The Ether Vibrates. What's this? Indeed I do not see any of the following in this department—no Kennedy, no Lessen, no Rehm, no Harvey, no Rehm, no Sherlock, no Rehm, no Rehm, no Rehm!

Froggie, who in Saturn are Lessen, Harvey and Sherlock? Rehmind me to look them up after the last bomb has fallen on once-sunny Alameda. Pfui and snafui! Get that Xeno here while we wash out the evil taste and consider planet flights to come.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

YE GOODE shippe STARTLING STORIES has come up with one of its finest full-length stf novels in history in THE VALLEY OF THE FLAME, by Keith Hammond. It relates the story of Brian Raft, young doctor working in the valley of Amazonas in Brazil, far from civilization, whose chief, Craddock, turns out to be extra-human following a visit from a man with a body temperature of eighty-six degrees Fahrenheit. Craddock vanishes that night, and young Raft sets out after him—and after the original of a volatile portrait of a girl with aquamarine eyes.

He finds her after a journey of unimaginable and grotesque horror in a world that is far different from any dreamed of even in Hollywood, surrounded by dangerous nightmare creatures whose very illogic is a direct result of the logical world in which they live. It is a story you fans will long remember with shuddery delight.

Featured with THE VALLEY OF THE FLAME is our Hall of Fame Classic, TWELVE HOURS

(Continued on page 8)

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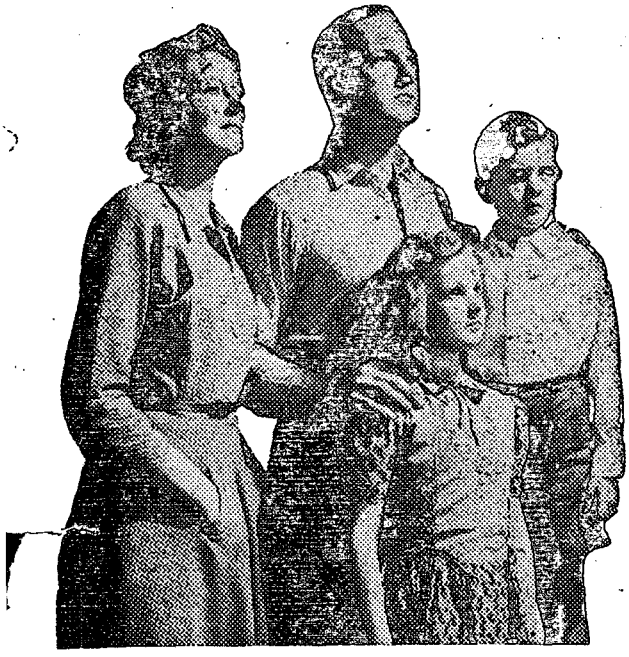
What's ahead?



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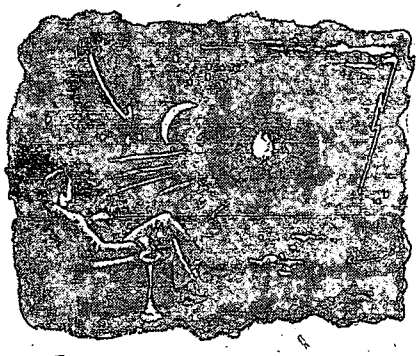

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

TO LIVE, by Jack Williamson, an interspatial story that won great acclaim on its original publication years ago in WONDER STORIES. And, of course, we have on hand a fine collection of short stories as well as the regular features.

Now, Wart-ears, bring out my chops—yes, kiwis, red point rationing has now extended as far as Pluto. I want to give them a lick before tackling the mail back and rending the misguided pee-lot critics teledendron from teledendron. A pretty prospect indeed.

ETHERGRAMS

THE apparent presence of a gentleman somewhat resembling Bob Hope's good professor in the lower right hand corner of our Fall cover has to date cast confusion on any number of fans, on artist Earle Bergey and has ye Sarge talking to himself as through a thick mustache in his sleep. Assassin Ralph Rehm was not alone in making snide remarks on the subject. Here is the pick of the crop.

WOE DE COLONNA

By David Olson

Dear Sarge: It was a bright day with the sun beaming down and a clean, refreshing wind blowing in from the lake. Young children (and, after all, what other kind do we have?) were frolicking about the streets with their innocent fun—chopping down trees and light poles with their little toy hatchets, beating on pedestrians with their harmless, little toy hammers, and maiming policemen with their harmless, little toy rocks—when a sudden change seemed to come over the landscape.

What was it that caused the sun to fade as if obscured by a cloud? What was it that caused the cool, clean wind to turn hot and be pervaded with an odor as of dead fish? The good housewives seemed to ken this mystery, for with furtive glances up and down the streets they hustled their children in from their innocent, harmless fun. Soon the streets were deserted—was it the horrible black plague that had struck?

I noticed the weird change from my garret window (ah yes! I have a garret, you know) and as a flicker of apprehension raced through my very being, I clasped my mighty sword to my side and strode fearlessly down the somber, dim, windswept streets to accost and ultimately do away with the foul thing that had so brutally halted the innocent play of the children.

As I passed homes I could see the townspeople courageously backing me with their eyes—someone had to make the supreme sacrifice. And so I tracked the odor to the magazine stand (our town has one, you know), and there, wrapped in asbestos so as to protect the other magazines from scorching, I saw—before I was temporarily blinded by the brilliance of the thing—the title "Startling."

So that was the cause of that terrible smell . . . and there must be some reason for it. The terrible drop in the fall issue's cover, I mean. *You know*, the cover—that thing on the front, laughingly put there to keep the flies off the inner pages—no other reason for it. Why? It ain't even logical.

I was surprised, not startled, when I first saw the fall cover. I was surprised in seeing, among other things, Professor Colona (I think that's how you spell his name) singing in a purple shirt. Either the shirt or the singing must explain the damsel's horrification, I thought. Then came the question—did Colona's singing cause the terrible destruction in the background or vice versa? To answer this intriguing question I turned to the lead novel and read it through. In fact I read the whole mag. No Colona.

(Continued on page 86)

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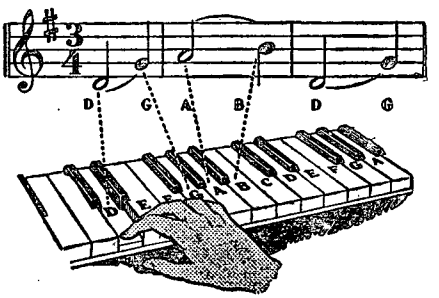

From the above diagram you can see for yourself how easy it is to learn by this Print and Picture method. You simply look at the music and diagram and see which notes to strike. In a few minutes you will find yourself playing the famous "Merry Widow Waltz."

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As Ru Ghur's ships rushed low over the Valley, Captain Future flung Joan to one side (CHAPTER XI)

OUTLAW WORLD

By EDMOND HAMILTON

On the trail of malevolent space pirates, Curt Newton and the Futuremen combat the evil machinations of the Uranian Ru Ghur, who plans the total destruction of the Universe!

CHAPTER I

Radium Raiders

DANGER was like a physical presence in the Orion, as the old space-freighter plodded through the lonely void. The ship was running dark, even its rocket-tubes baffled so that no betraying flare of flame would mark its course as it droned on the long voyage from Saturn toward Earth.

In his cubby, the telaudio operator, a dark-haired, clear-eyed, tanned young Earthman, alertly listened at his instruments.

"Planet Patrol calling all ships between Saturn and Jupiter," issued a sharp voice from the loud-speaker.

The operator made no attempt to answer. He had strict orders to maintain telaudio silence.

"Urgent warning!" continued the sharp voice. "Unidentified cruisers, believed radium raiders, sighted entering your sector."

As the operator jumped to his feet he heard a shrill shout from the lookout man forward.

A COMPLETE CAPTAIN FUTURE NOVEL

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"Four ships aft of our port beam, pulling up fast!"

The telaudio man leaped for the door, plunged for the bridge-room.

Captain Greeley, the grizzled old Earthman who was master of the Orion, was already there. He was peering through the small round lens-window of the aft televiewer, a powerful telescopic instrument.

The window was an eye peering into space, a dark abyss hung with the jeweled tapestry of the stars. Saturn was a yellow spark astern. Jupiter lay ahead, and beyond it the asteroid zone glinted against the flaring little Sun.

The telescopic window showed what the unaided eye could not see—four long, slim cruisers, running dark, pursuing the Orion. The stubby muzzles of heavy atom-guns that protruded from the sides of the cruisers were clearly recognizable.

"They aren't Patrol ships, and that means they're pirates!" exclaimed the Captain. "Look at those guns!"

"The Patrol just flashed warning that radium raiders are operating in this sector, sir!" rapidly reported the telaudio operator.

"Full speed on all cycs!" Captain Greely shouted to the pilot.

The throbbing of the Cyclotrons down in the lowest deck instantly intensified to a roar. The old freighter quivered to the increased thrust of power from its stern rocket-tubes.

"Radium raiders?" the Venusian second officer was repeating, thunderstruck. "But how could they know we've got two tons of refined radium ores abroad? We took off from Saturn secretly!"

"A lot of other radium ships have taken off just as secretly, and those devils found them," gritted the captain. He swung toward his telaudio operator. "Call the Patrol and tell them we're being chased. There's no use maintaining silence now!"

AS THE young operator raced back, his own mind was grappling with the mystery.

"How could they have known our cargo and course? And where did they come from?"

The radium raiders who had first appeared a month before were the enigma of the Solar System. In bands of up to a half-dozen cruisers, they pounced upon and looted unarmed freighters, then disappeared as magically as they came.

Space pirates were no new thing, to the System. There were always some corsairs infesting the outlaw asteroids or the wilder moons of the outer planets. But these radium raiders were different from any other pirates ever before encountered.

They sought only radium, the most valuable substance in the System, the element necessary for so many industrial and scientific power projects. Much radium was mined on Saturn and Uranus, and transported to the inner planets. The raiders had cut off almost every such shipment. No matter how secretly a radium ship took off, they seemed to have knowledge of its movements.

Greatest mystery of all was the raiders' origin. They did not come from any known part of the System. That had been established by Patrol searches. They seemed to enter the System from above the planetary plane, and to drive up out of it after each foray.

Did they come from some interstellar lair far across deep space? Or were they from another dimension entirely? These, and wilder surmises were afoot.

"Freighter Orion to all stations and squadrons of the Planet Patrol!" shouted the young operator into his microphone. "Being pursued between Saturn and Jupiter by radium raiders!"

There came a flash of brilliant light outside the windows of the speeding ship, a glare that lit up all space for a second.

"They're within range!" a yell rang through the ship.

The operator glanced swiftly through the port-hole and glimpsed a scene to bring a chill to the stoutest heart.

The four black cruisers, rapidly overtaking the fleeing freighter, were using their heavy atom-guns.

He glimpsed a shower of atom-shells rushing toward them. Then another blinding blaze of light, a quivering shock through the ship, and the roar of an explosion.

"We're hit!" yelled the Venusian mate. "Caught our stern, and half the tube back-blasted!"

The explosion had flung the telaudio operator to the floor. He heard rending metal, the shriek of escaping air, the clang-clang of automatic bulkheads closing to prevent its escape.

The Orion's stern rocket-tubes had been ripped into junk, and a back-blast along the power pipes had exploded the cyclotrons.

"We've been crippled and are about to be boarded!" the operator shouted into the microphone as he scrambled to his feet. "Our space position as follows—"

The raiders' four cruisers drew swiftly abreast the disabled *Orion* as it sagged helplessly in space. Magnetic anchors shot out to grapple the freighter and draw it close by cables.

Then men in space-suits, heavily armed, came leaping across the narrow gap and swarming into the wrecked freighter.

Resistance was out of the question. The few stunned survivors were overwhelmed.

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Out of the green gloom of the jungle whistled streaks of light that were flying spears (CHAPTER XVII)

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Only the telaudio operator continued to shout into his instrument, rattling off their space position.

A crackling bolt of atomic energy speared past his head and tore into the metal wall.

"Get away from those instruments!" ordered a smooth voice.

The operator slowly turned from the telaudio and raised his hands. A dozen raiders had crowded outside the cubby. In their black space-suits they were a grim interplanetary band.

The leader was a fat, moon-faced man who turned to give orders.

"Start searching the holds for the radium. Make the prisoners tell where it is. Transfer the stuff to my cruiser immediately. The Patrol will soon be here—hurry!"

He turned back to motion the telaudio operator out of the cubby. And the young Earthman was thunder-struck as he glimpsed the leader's face inside his glassite helmet.

"You!" he cried, stunned. "But you're dead!"

CHAPTER II

Warning from Space

FROM where did the mysterious radium raiders come?

Though that question had alarmed the whole Solar System, no one could do more than guess at the origin of these dangerous marauders.

There were wild rumors of an unknown planet where the radium raiders had their base, an Outlaw World. But where was that Outlaw World?

Not even the Commander of the Planet Patrol could answer that. In his headquarters in New York, on Earth, Commander Halk Anders' bulldog face was grim as he admitted his mystification to two trusted aides.

"We can't find the raiders until we find their secret base," he said, "and discover how they're able to trace every secret radium shipment, and why they loot only radium." His big hands clenched. "And they must be found and destroyed! Radium is vital as a source of super-atomic power. And they have almost cut off its flow. Where can they possibly be coming from?"

Ezra Gurney, white-haired, black-eyed old veteran marshal of the Patrol, spoke in a skeptical drawl.

"I hope you don't believe that about the raiders' Outlaw World maybe bein' in another dimension or universe?"

"I don't know," muttered Anders. "It's certain the raiders do not have their base on any world of our System."

Ezra pointed up at a huge wall chart of the Solar System that depicted all its worlds from Vulcan, the little solar satellite, out to distant Pluto.

"Not countin' Vulcan, which is too hot for life, there's nine planets, thirty-one moons an' several hundred asteroids in the System," he drawled. "What makes you so sure the raiders' base ain't on one of them?"

"Because after every foray, the raiders have sped up out of the System," replied the Commander. "They've headed right out into deep space. That's why we've never been able to intercept them." A haunting doubt crept into his eyes. "Maybe their Outlaw World is in another universe or dimension."

The second of his two aides, a dark-haired girl, ventured a suggestion. Slim and lovely in tailored space-slacks, she looked out of place in these grimly military surroundings. Yet Joan Randall, ace secret agent of the Patrol, was one of its most brilliant minds. The Commander knew that. It was why he had called her and her old comrade, Marshal Ezra Gurney, to this conference.

"As to the raiders' uncanny knowledge of radium shipments," she said, "isn't it possible they're using spies planted on radium ships?"

"It could be," admitted Anders. "But that still wouldn't explain the big mystery, the Outlaw World."

He was interrupted by the entrance of an excited young officer in the drab gray uniform of the Patrol.

"Sir, a flash has just come through from the freighter Orion that it is being attacked between Saturn and Jupiter!"

Halk Anders instantly touched a switch, connecting his desk interphone with the main telaudio room.

"Cut me into the Orion's call!" he ordered.

Suddenly there came from the instrument the sound of an explosion and the crash of rending metal. Sounds from the telaudio of the ship that was being attacked five hundred million miles out in space!

Through that ominous din came the half-smothered voice of the *Orion's* telaudio operator:

"We've been crippled and are about to be boarded! Our space position is—

As the operator yelled the coordinates above the din, the Commander shot an order at the officer who had brought him word.

"Flash every Patrol squadron in the Jupiter-Saturn sector to make for that position! Tell them to box the whole region and close in!"

"They'll be too late," muttered Ezra Gurney pessimistically. "The raiders are always gone before we get there."

The Commander listened tensely, but no

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further sound came from the Orion's telaudio.

"Done for," he said heavily. "The operator has probably been killed by now."

Joan Randall's brown eyes suddenly flashed with excitement.

"Listen! More is coming through—in code!"

From the loud-speaker issuing an almost imperceptible sound of light tapping, irregular in rhythm.

"The Orion operator is code-tapping a message!" Joan cried. "That's standard interplanetary code!"

Each of the three could read the code. "Ship taken," rapped the faint signals. "Leader of radium raiders is Ru Ghur, outlawed Uranian scientist who—"

The code message stopped there, abruptly. And there came a report from the main telaudio room.

"The Orion's beam just went dead, sir. "The transmitter must have been destroyed."

HALK ANDERS and Joan and Ezra hardly heard him, for they three were looking at each other in stupefied astonishment.

"Ru Ghur!" Ezra finally burst out. "Why, that's impossible! Ru Ghur's been dead for a year!"

The Commander's eyes narrowed. "Nobody ever saw that Uranian's body," he muttered.

Gurney made an impatient gesture. "What difference does that make? Ru Ghur must have perished when he fled to escape the Futuremen. Why, he had only a flimsy little cruiser. He couldn't have reached another star."

"But what if he managed to survive somehow in deep space?" Halk Anders insisted. "What if he found refuge in some part of the universe, and has come back at the head of the raiders?"

"If that's so," whispered Joan, "the raiders are even more dangerous than we dreamed. For they're led by the most dangerous criminal in the System's history!"

The suggestion appalled them. For the very name of the master scientist of crime cast a chill shadow which they had believed lifted from the System.

Ru Ghur of Uranus had been a very great scientist, indeed. He had been a master, especially, in the study of radiation and its effects. But he had turned his most brilliant discovery to evil ends. For he had discovered a ray that had a strange effect. That subtle radiation brought dreams to the mind, dreams that seemed utterly real, that brought true all the subject's dearest hopes—while the dreams lasted.

Ru Ghur had called it the "Lethe-ray", and he had sold it to people who wished to drug themselves with dreams. Under its influence, they attained their heart's desire—in visions that seemed real. But the ray was soul-destroying. If its use was continued for long, its victims could not live without it.

This infamous traffic had numbered victims by the hundreds. Then Captain Future, the young Earthman who was the System's greatest scientist-adventurer, had stepped in. He and his comrades, the Futuremen, had broken up Ru Ghur's evil traffic. They had relentlessly pursued the Uranian scientist until he had fled out of the System and had been considered dead.

"If Ru Ghur didn't die out there in deep space, where did he find refuge?" muttered the Commander. "Has he come back from another universe?"

Ezra Gurney shook his head. "I still can't believe that the Outlaw World of those raiders is in a different dimension or universe."

"If Ru Ghur has come back," Joan exclaimed, "we ought to notify Captain Future at once!"

Halk Anders nodded. "Yes, the Futuremen ought to be told. The Patrol can handle ordinary pirates or outlaws, but when it comes to matching the tricks of a scientific genius like that Uranian devil, we'll need Captain Future and his comrades." He looked at Joan. "Where are the Futuremen now? At their Moon laboratory home?"

"Yes," Joan said eagerly, "I'm sure they're still there. Do you want Ezra and me to take this news to them?"

"Yes," Anders said. "Captain Future trusts your judgment."

"Ru Ghur's return will bring Cap'n Future into this business plenty fast," predicted Ezra. "He knows how dangerous that cursed Uranian is."

Joan was on her feet. "We'll start at once. I'll take one of the fast little dispatch-cruisers. We ought to reach the Moon by noon solar time."

It lacked minutes of the hour she named when the small torpedo-shaped cruiser in which she and Ezra had left Earth approached the rugged, rocky surface of the Moon. This forbidding, airless satellite of Earth had only four inhabitants—Captain Future and the Futuremen.

"This darned place always gives me the creeps," murmured old Ezra as the cruiser swung low over the gigantic craters and stark peaks. "I don't see how Cap'n Future stands it, as a home."

"He was born here, remember," Joan reminded.

Years before, a brilliant young scientist, Roger Newton, and his bride had come to the lonely Moon for refuge from enemies. With them had come Simon Wright, the Brain, who was Newton's colleague in a great

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experimental attempt to create intelligent living beings.

Here they had built an underground laboratory home. Here, they had artificially created two intelligent living beings—a mighty robot and an android, or synthetic man. And here an infant son had been born to Roger and Elaine Newton.

Then tragedy had struck. Their enemies had followed them to the Moon. The young scientist and his bride were slain. And the infant, Curtis Newton, had been left in the care of the strange trio, the Brain and the robot and the android.

THEY had given him the wonderful education which had made Curt Newton not only a wizard of science but also the most daring and resourceful planeteer who had ever taken the spaceways. The whole System had come to know him as Captain Future, a laughing, red-haired young Earthman who made it his mission in life to crush interplanetary criminals, and attempt to expand human empire to the stars.

Joan's brown eyes were eager. "There's Tycho crater ahead—we're almost there."

Old Ezra looked at her with a quizzical grin. "Sort of anxious to see Cap'n Future, ain't you? Now in my time, women didn't go followin' their sweethearts all over space."

Joan made no retort, busy bringing the cruiser down into the giant ring of Tycho crater.

Upon the sun-scorched floor of the mighty crater glittered a circle of smooth glassite. It marked the underground laboratory of the Futuremen. Joan landed close by it.

"Hurry, Ezra," she urged, as she got into her space-suit.

"Don't rush," drawled Ezra. "The Futuremen already know we're here. They got devices that let 'em know when any ship lands."

The veteran and the girl emerged from the cruiser and tramped toward a cement stairway that led down beneath the lunar surface into a large airlock. Startlingly, a giant metal figure suddenly loomed up to confront them.

"It's Grag," Ezra said. "Didn't I tell you they'd know we were here?"

Grag was, to them, a familiar figure. To unexperienced eyes, he would have seemed awesome—a massive, manlike figure of metal, seven feet high. His giant legs and arms plainly hinted at the prodigious strength that was unmatched in the System.

But Grag had more than mere strength. In his metal head was a complex mechanical brain that made him more than a robot. Intelligence shone from his two glowing photo-electric eyes. His mechanical voder-voice boomed in glad greeting.

"Joan and Ezra! I thought it must be you when the alarms went. Nobody else would dare land on the Moon without permission."

They had passed through the airlock and now could take off their helmets, for they had entered the air-filled laboratory, the heart of an underground citadel of science.

It was a big, round room, lit by a flood of sunlight from the glassite ceiling window. Towering machines and instruments crowded it. Doors led to store-rooms, living quarters, and the underground hangar of the Futuremen's famous space-ship, the Comet.

But the only occupants of the laboratory were the two queer little animals scuffling playfully in a corner—Eek and Oog, the pets of the Futuremen.

"Where's Curt?" Joan asked the big robot.

"The Chief's not here right now," Grag answered. "But here's Simon and Otho."

The other two Futuremen had just entered—Otho, the android, and Simon Wright, the living Brain.

Otho was the most human-looking. Indeed, he was a man in almost every sense of the word except that he was an artificial man, one created synthetically in this very laboratory.

He was of middle height, lithe and agile, with a pale white face whose sensitive and intelligent features were most remarkable for the slanted, jade-green eyes that always had sparks of deviltry and recklessness in them.

"Nothing's wrong, is it?" Otho asked the girl and the old marshal quickly.

Joan nodded soberly. "Something's very wrong, Otho. It's why we're here."

"What is it, Joan?" the Brain asked in his metallic voice.

The Brain was the strangest of the three Futuremen. Yet he had once been an ordinary human. He had once been Dr. Simon Wright, a renowned, aged master of science who had been dying when a miraculous operation had been performed. His living brain had been transferred into a serum case, in which it had dwelt, unaging, ever since.

NOW the Brain resembled a square, transparent metal case, upon whose "face" were his lenslike glass eyes, his microphone ears and resonator speech apparatus. He hovered six feet above the floor, for Simon could glide through the air by means of magnetic traction beams which he could also use as arms and hands.

"What is it that's wrong?" he asked sharply.

"Radium-raiders—a mysterious band who are looting radium from ships and mines all over the System!" Joan answered. "We can't find where they come from, and so we can't

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stop them."

"We heard all about their forays," Otho answered calmly. "The Chief is on their trail now."

"Curt went out after the raiders without you Futuremen?" Joan exclaimed, surprised.

"He insisted on doing so," Simon explained. "Curtis believes the raiders get their uncanny knowledge of radium shipments by means of spies on radium ships. So he sailed in a radium ship, in disguise."

"He said we couldn't go with him," Grag complained, "but that he'd call us when he needed us."

"But you don't know that the head of these radium raiders is Ru Ghur, the Uranian!" Joan said quickly.

It was a bombshell to the Futuremen. The name of their deadliest enemy, the man whose infamous "Lethe ray" traffic had started their greatest struggle, electrified them.

"Ru Ghur!" exclaimed Simon Wright. "Impossible!"

"It's true," affirmed Ezra. "We just got the flash from a ship the raiders attacked—the freighter Orion."

"The Orion?" cried Otho, aghast. "Captain Future is abroad that ship!"

CHAPTER III

Into Dreams

IN THE crippled *Orion*, the young telaudio operator of the freighter stared in amazement at the leader of the radium raiders. For that operator was none other than Captain Future! He had dyed his red hair, before obtaining his position on the radium-carrying ship, hoping to get on the raiders' trail.

"You're Ru Ghur—but you're dead!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Ah, so you know who I am?" the Uranian raider leader said softly.

Ru Ghur was a fat man—fat almost to grossness. His squat, tubby figure looked even more bulky in his shapeless space suit. With his moonlike yellow face and bald head he looked the picture of a fat, friendly and harmless man—all except his eyes. They were black and bright and merciless, mirrors of the man's brilliant intelligence and remorseless. They bored into Curt Newton's

As Bork uttered the warning a black, monstrous shape rose out of the web (CHAPTER VI)

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"So you recognized me?" Ru Ghur murmured. "That's interesting. How did you know me?"

Curt shrugged. "Your picture was posted everywhere by the Patrol, when they were fighting your Lethe-ray traffic."

"Ah, yes," said the Uraninan. "That explains it. But it doesn't explain why you look familiar to me."

Captain Future tensed. He knew the danger of the Uranian's sharp eyes penetrating his disguise.

Curt Newton's mind was seething from the shock of discovery that Ru Ghur was leading the raiders. Even the facts that the raiders had tracked down the ship, though Curt had detected no spies aboard, that the Orion was in their hands, and that his own life was imperiled, were unimportant beside the knowledge that this dangerous criminal was alive.

At all costs, the Futuremen and the Patrol must be warned of Ru Ghur's return. The telaudio circuit was still open. But an attempt to speak a word into its microphone would mean instant death.

Captain Future let his hand fall idly to the microphone. His fingernail inaudibly tapped its edges, spelled out a message in standard interplanetery code.

> Ship taken—leader of radium-raiders is Ru-Ghur.

As he tapped, Curt Newton spoke loudly to the Uranian to distract his attention.

"What are you going to do to us prisoners?" he demanded.

The Uranian's moon face assumed a look of sadness. "Ah, I was afraid you'd ask that. For I'm under the cruel necessity of ordering your deaths."

"Can't you just leave us here in the wreck?" Captain Future asked, as he kept up his surreptitious tapping.

The Uranian shook his head sorrowfully. "No, no, it wouldn't be wise to leave you alive, possibly to give information to the Patrol. I'm surprised . . . Get your hand away from the microphone!" He had detected the signaling.

Curt Newton realized the game was up. There was just one chance left, and he took it. His hand reached for the proton-pistol inside his jacket with blurring speed.

Too late! Ru Ghur, whose atom-gun was already in his hand, had too big an advantage for even Curt's phenomenal draw to overcome.

But the fat Uranian didn't shoot. He merely struck with viper-swiftness, his weapon's barrel crashing against Curt's skull.

"Grab him—no, don't kill him yet!" Ru Ghur was shouting to his men. "I want a look at him first."

The Uranian's followers were men of almost every planetery race—brawny green Jovians, thin Saturnians, wizened, swarthy Mercurians, vicious-looking Earthmen. Pirates, outlaws, all of them.

Curt Newton felt them pinion his arms, without being able to resist.

"Hold his face to the light here," ordered Ru Ghur. "I want to know who this chap is who's so clever in trying to trick poor old Ru Ghur."

His small, bright eyes ran over his prisoner, from head to foot. He saw a six-feet-four young Earthman whose lean body was that of a fighting man; dark, curly hair; a space-browned, handsome face; and gray eyes that now were dazed and clouded.

"No ordinary telaudio operator would be so clever," Ru Ghur was murmuring. "Nor would he look so familiar to me." Ru stopped suddenly, his black eyes narrowed to pinpoints. "Ah," he said, "I might have known. Old Ru Ghur's wits must be wandering, or I'd have recognized him at once in spite of that dyed hair."

A TWITCHING of his flabby cheeks alone betrayed his intense excitement.

"There's blind justice in the universe, after all," he said softly. "A justice that has brought into my hands the man who so cruelly wronged me."

"Who is it, Chief?" asked the thin gray Saturnian who was holding Curt's left arm.

"You'll find out later, Kra Krol," said Ru Ghur. "Put a space-suit on him and take him over to the Falcon. The rest of you get out that radium."

"Why bother taking a prisoner?" grumbled the Saturnian. "I can blast him right here, and save trouble."

Ru Ghur's voice rose to a whine. "If you do, I'll cut you into ribbons—and soft-hearted old Ru Ghur would hate to do that."

Curt Newton had heard their voices as though from a great distance. He was only dazedly aware of the raiders hastily putting a space-suit on him, and hauling him into Ru Ghur's flagship.

When his sense cleared he saw that he had been taken into the main cabin of the raider cruiser, and bound in a recoil-chair. His head aching violently, he looked around.

The cabin was almost a laboratory. Scientific instruments, some of them unfamiliar even to Captain Future's trained eyes, crowded it.

Through the port-holes he glimpsed raiders hastily bringing aboard the square lead cases of refined radium ore.

And his dominant emotion was disgust with himself. His scheme to find the radium raiders had ended disastrously.

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"A fine bright planeteer I am, to fall into their trap while I was setting one of my own," he muttered. "But how was anyone to know that Uranian-devil was alive and mixed up in this thing?"

He ignored the peril of his own situation. He knew the depth of Ru Ghur's hate, and realized that if the Uranian had not killed him instantly, it was because he had something worse in mind. But Captain Future lived by the fatalistic, fearless creed that had been bred into him by the Brain, the robot, and the android. Until death stopped him, no danger to himself would swerve him from a fixed purpose.

"One sure thing," he muttered, "if Ru Ghur planned these radium raids, they're far bigger than we feared. Why is he gathering all this radium?"

Ru Ghur and his Saturnian second-in-command now entered the cabin.

"Get going before the Patrol boxes us in, Kra Kol," snapped the Uranian leader. "Follow the course I plotted—and hurry!"

The Falcon's cyclotrons throbbed, its rocket-tubes roared, and it and the other three raider cruisers darted off into the abyss away from the floating wreck of the Orion.

Ru Ghur divested himself of his helmet and suit, came over and looked down at his bound prisoner with a beaming smile on his moonlike face.

"I'm too fat and old to be skittering around space like this," he puffed. "I ought to be in my villa in Uranopolis—and I'd still be there if you hadn't driven me out of the System, Captain Future."

"Where is this outlaw world of yours, Ru Ghur?" asked Curt coolly.

The Uranian's small eyes twinkled. "Ah, that's my secret, a secret the Planet Patrol would give much to know. You thought I would perish out there in the starry abyss. But I found a refuge of whose existence none of you have dreamed. Aye, a strange and fearful place is Outlaw World, as you call it."

His fat cheeks quivered in pretended self-pity. "But it's a sad thing for a poor, unoffending old scientist to be driven out of his home into such terrible, unknown regions. It was a wicked persecution that you Futuremen visited upon me."

"We should have killed you," Curt Newton said bleakly. "You deserved it for operating that Lethe-ray traffic."

Ru Ghur shook his bald yellow head reproachfully. "You were always bigoted about my great contributions to humanity. The Lethe-ray was a blessing to many poor souls. It allowed them to achieve all their hopes and desires, in dreams."

"And in time made them, ready to rob or kill to pay you for the ray," rapped Newton.

"Ah, I see that you're still intolerant," murmured the fat scientist. "And that means that I must take steps to prevent your working against me again."

"Why not say straight out you mean to kill me?" Curt said disgustedly.

Ru Ghur looked shocked. "Why, lad, poor old Ru Ghur is far too chicken-hearted to murder you, especially when you can be useful to me."

CAPTAIN Future looked at him sharply. "Just what do you mean?"

The Uranian's small eyes glistened. "I have planned a great enterprise, the greatest any man ever conceived. And I don't want to be interfered with while I am making the necessary preparations for it. You will be a valuable hostage, Captain Future. If those Futuremen of yours should get too troublesome, or even if the Planet Patrol should get close on my trail, I can bargain with them for your life."

"Just what is this great enterprise of yours?" Captain Newton asked. "Why are you going to such lengths to amass great quantities of radium?"

"You'll soon find out," promised Ru Ghur, with a benevolent smile. "Yes, the whole Solar System will find out, to their cost."

Captain Future speculated swiftly. "You're going to your Outlaw World base now?"

"Yes, but first we are going to stop and pick up some more radium from certain wicked outlaws who tried to forestall poor old Rhu Ghur. They are a bunch of Martian outlaws headed by one Bork King and are connected with the Companions of Space, as the pirates are called. A few days ago, Bork King's band held up the Pluto-Venus liner and took a valuable shipment off it."

Ru Ghur shook his head as though at the wickedness of men.

"Bork King's ship is now lying in hiding on Leda, one of the smaller moons of Jupiter, waiting for the Patrol hunt to die down so that they can make another foray," he went on. "They think themselves safely hidden, but won't they be surprised when old Ru Ghur swoops down on them and takes that radium away from them!"

The Uranian's moonlike face beamed in a smile of happy anticipation.

"How do you manage to trace every ship that has radium in it, as you do, Ru Ghur?" Captain Future asked.

Ru Ghur smirked. "Poor old Ru Ghur has his little scientific secrets, lad. You'll learn all about them when you get to Outlaw World." His small bright eyes glinted with mirth as he went on, "I can see what you're thinking, Captain Future. You think that long before we get to my base you'll find a way to escape from this ship. I know how

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clever and resourceful you can be. But you're not going to make any effort to escape. You're going to Outlaw World as peaceable as a lamb. And you're going to be happy, so happy that you won't even think of trying to get away from us."

The Uranian went across the cabin and wheeled over to the side of Curt's chair a tall and complicated instrument whose most striking feature was a quartz-lensed projector like a small searchlight. This projector hung from a tall standard and was linked by cables to electrical apparatus in the base of the machine.

Ru Ghur adjusted the projector so that its quartz lens was just above Captain Future's skull. As he arranged the apparatus and touched a graduated intensity-control, he talked in his unctuous, mocking way.

"This is what's going to keep you happy and contented while you're on my ship, Captain Future. It's the great boon and blessing that old Ru Ghur's science gave to the unhappy worlds, my Lethe-ray that brings such joy to the soul."

CHAPTER IV

Surprise Attack

CURT NEWTON twisted angrily in his bonds, as he understood the intention of the Uranian. He strained convulsively but could not break the bonds. No man could.

"You can't keep me under the influence of that accursed ray all the way!" he shouted furiously.

"Of course I can, and I shall," Ru Ghur beamed. "And you'll be so happy in your dreams come true that you won't even know you're on the ship and won't be bothering us by attempting to escape."

Curt shrank as from something unclean. There had always seemed something unholy to him about the Lethe-ray. And he knew that exposure to it for too long a period could wreck the mind, could send it down into a drugged darkness from which it would never return.

Ru Ghur had started the machine humming. He twisted the intensity control knob a notch higher, and his hand rested for a moment on a switch.

"You understand the principle of the Lethe-ray, of course," he said. "It blocks off all those main portions of the brain concerned with real sensations, facts and memories. Thus it releases the hopes and dreams that live in the imagination, to dominate the whole brain. You lose all touch with the world around you because your brain is no longer in contact with it. The only reality becomes those secret hopes and wishes which you cherish in your inmost mind."

He turned the switch. From the quartz lens of the machine, an invisible force streamed down on Captain Future's head. He felt himself instantly whirled through a rushing, howling darkness—and was suddenly in a wholly new environment.

He stood upon a small asteroid whose parklike green forests were wrapped in a golden haze. A soft wind stirred perfume from large, pastel-colored asteroid-orchids that grew in profusion. Flame birds cut like flying fires through the branches overhead.

He knew that little asteroid. He had seen it in his dreams many times since he once had chanced to land on it. It was uninhabited, away from the main trade routes, a golden, forgotten little world. And he had always hoped that some day when the lawless days in the System were no more, he could make that world his home.

Now that day had come! Curt Newton felt a bursting, vibrant joy that the long struggle was over. There was no more need for the Futuremen to blaze their grim trail between the worlds, there was no more need for them to maintain their vigilant watch on the harsh, wild Moon. The dangerous days in the System were over, as he had dreamed they might be some day. Captain Future, the personification of avenging law throughout the civilized universe for so long, was no more. He was just Curt Newton now, and this was his home.

Curt walked on through the golden forest to a clearing gay with brilliant flowers. There was a small house here, a shimmering white plastic cottage drowsing in the sunshine, lapped by the unbroken peace of this unvisited little world.

A dark-haired girl came out of the cottage and came happily into his arms.

"Isn't it wonderful, Curt," she murmured. "It's just as we always dreamed it would be."

"I still can't get used to it, Joan," he confessed smilingly. "I still think I'll suddenly get a call from the System Government and that it will all start over again."

She shook her head. "The Patrol will never need you again, Curt."

He went into the house with her. Simon Wright the Brain, was there, in the little laboratory where at last he was able to continue his abstruse researches without interruption.

From behind the house came the voices of Grag and Otho raised in one of their perpetual arguments.

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Curt Newton felt a deep happiness. "I almost think that I'll wake up and find that I've been dreaming," he murmured to Joan.

"Dreaming yet, Captain Future?"

That soft, mocking voice suddenly shattered the whole fabric of golden happiness.

Curt Newton found his head rocking dizzily, and opened his eyes to find himself in the cabin in Ru Guhr's speeding space-ship. That hours had passed, he could guess from the altered positions of the planets he could glimpse through the port-hole windows.

RU GHUR'S moonlike face beamed down at him.

"Did you like it, Captain Future? Did you like the Lethe-ray?"

"You devil!" flamed Curt Newton, stricken to the heart by the sudden fading of that golden dream that had seemed so real. "No wonder people have sold their souls for that infernal ray!"

"So you saw your dreams come true?" taunted Ru Ghur. "And then you had to leave it all and come back here? Ah, that's to bad. But you can go back to them. We just turned off the ray for a few minutes to feed you, Captain Future. People lose strength quickly under too much of the Lethe-ray. And you're too valuable a hostage to lose."

Curt Newton mechanically drank down the the nutrient fluid they raised to his lips. His bonds were not loosened.

"And now we'll let you go back to your happiness, lad," crooned Ru Ghur. "Why, I envy you."

He switched on the Lethe-ray, and swiftly Curt Newton felt himself whirled back into that golden world of his dreams. Dreams—dreams. . . . He knew nothing but those cherished visions made real. It was the old life of struggle and danger that seemed a dream. . . .

Curt knew that many hours must have passed when again he found himself coming back from that dream world into the reality of Ru Ghur's raider ship.

Kra Kol, the thin gray Saturnian who was Ru Ghur's lieutenant, had turned off the Lethe-ray and was again holding the glass of stimulant for Curt Newton to drink.

"Wait—wait a minute," mumbled Curt. "I'm too dizzy to drink now."

"Well, hurry up," growled Kra Kol. "We're nearly to Leda, and you've got to be well under the ray when we make our attack on the Martians there."

Captain Future well realized that his only chance of escaping this diabolical captivity beneath the ray was in the few moments when the ray was turned off. And he must find a way to freedom somehow, for if he underwent much more of the drugging influence of the Lethe-ray, he would become utterly sodden and incapable of action.

Kral Kol had gone to the port-hole windows to look out, apparently to judge their nearness to Jupiters' moon. Curt's reviving brain seized upon an expedient that suddenly occurred to him.

He leaned forward in his bonds toward the Lethe-ray machine directly in front of his chair. He could just reach the little control panel with his face.

He fastened his teeth on the knob of the intensity control. With swift turning movements of his head, he turned the knob so that its pointer reached low on the intensity scale.

"If you're too dizzy yet to drink this stuff, you'll go without it," Kra Kol said angrily, coming back to him. "It's all foolishness keeping a prisoner alive, anyway."

Captain Future had jerked his head back just in time.

He maintained a numb, dizzy look as he drank the liquid. Immediately, Kra Kol switched the Lethe ray and hastily went out of the cabin.

Captain Fututre felt the Lethe-ray strike his brain. But its intensity now was nearly zero and it had not nearly so powerful an effect. It merely brought a certain vagueness, but did not make him incapable of

[*Turn page*]

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thought and action.

"Now if I could just get loose and get my hands on a weapon!" he thought grimly.

He could do nothing while he was bound in this chair, a typical space-ship recoil chair, supported by a pedestal that slid up and down in a pneumatic sleeve.

The raider ship shook to brake blasts, making it evident that it was nearing Jupiter's moon. And these brake blasts gave Captain Future an idea.

He twisted his bound feet under the chair until they found the safety dog that locked the sliding pedestal into the sleeve. He kicked until he had forced the dog out.

"Now for a good, hard bump," he thought ruefully.

A few minutes later came another brake blast. The pressure of deceleration, as usual, threw Curt's recoil chair upward.

But this time, without the safety dog in place, the movable upper part of the chair was thrown clear out of the sleeve. Curt Newton, and the chair frame into which he was bound, were hurled with a crash to the floor. He had been expecting it and ducked his head to avoid being knocked unconscious.

WHEN his head cleared, he began to make calculated movements that enabled him after many efforts to roll clumsily toward the base of a tall electrical mechanism that was part of Ru Ghur's elaborate scientific equipment.

He had spotted that machine as having a base with sharp metal edges that would serve his purpose. He twisted until he could bring his bound hands against that sharp edge, and then began rapidly rubbing his bonds to and fro.

"There's not much time,' he thought tightly. "Unles I'm much mistaken, there's going to be battle and sudden death in a few minutes."

His head was clear, now that he had completely escaped the influence of the Letheray. And Captain Future, as he worked urgently at his bonds, was remembering what Ru Ghur had told him .

The Uranian had said that they were going to Leda, one of Jupiter's smaller moons, to make a surprise attack on Bork King's Martian outlaws who had forestalled the raiders in robbing a radium shipment from a liner.

"A case of wolf eat wolf," Curt Newton thought grimly. "But the important thing is that Ru Ghur is the particular wolf I'm after above all others."

He knew that Ru Ghur had been able to find Bork King's hiding place on Leda by somehow tracing the radium shipment the Martian outlaws had stolen. But how, he could not guess.

"There's something unearthly about the way that Uranian devil can trace radium at any distance," he thought.

He finally got his hands free. As he tore at the rest of his bonds, he heard a whistling roar outside the ship.

"That's atmosphere!" he muttered. "We've reached Leda!"

In a moment he was on his feet, searching the cabin. He soon found an atom-pistol amid Ru Ghur's private arsenal of weapons. He sprang to open the cabin door.

At that instant, he heard from forward in the raider ship the sharp cry of Ru Guhr.

"That's Bork King's ship down there in the glade! Don't use the guns! Give them the sleep-gas!"

Captain Future sprang to the port-hole windows. He looked down on the nighted jungles that covered this side of Leda.

Those weirdly beautiful jungles were flower forests! Instead of trees, gigantic flowers towered on massive stalks to a height of a hundred feet. Huge, waving moon lilies, great flame roses whose blooms were thirty feet in diameter, enormous, nodding orchids—their dense thickets lay in the silvery light of great Jupiter like a vast garden planted by giants.

Several of Jupiter's smaller moons possessed such flower forests, due to an excess of carbon dioxide in their atmosphere. But the great flower jungles of this moon Leda were the wildest and most beautiful of all.

Captain Future glimpsed the torpedo-shaped bulk of a small space-cruiser on the ground, half-hidden amid towering flame roses. Men were running toward the ship in alarm.

Ru Ghur's raider ships poised for a moment amid the gigantic flowers, their keel jets blasting. A great cloud of white vapor spurted down and enveloped the glade.

"Sleep-gas!" Curt Newton exclaimed. "They had the keel-jets of their ship loaded with it!"

The raider cruisers quickly landed beneath the towering flame roses. The raiders poured out.

Captain Future waited tensely, watching for an opportunity to attack Ru Ghur when the odds were less suicidal.

In the dappled planet light of the glade of giant flowers, Bork King's Martian outlaws lay in stupefied sleep, though the breeze had quickly carried away the sleep-gas.

Ru Ghur uttered sharp commands.

"Gather up their guns, and find Bork King and bring him back to consciousness. Kra Kol, look for the radium."

The Saturnian entered the Martian cruiser, and returned a moment later.

"The stuff's in there, all right!" he said.

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"Good!" said Ru Ghur. "As soon as the men have made sure we have all the Martians, we'll have them carry it into the Falcon."

Two raiders came up with a man whose hands were bound. "Here's Bork King," one of them said. "We revived him."

BORK KING, Curt saw, was a big, iron-framed Martian of middle age. His craggy red face, fierce black eyes and shock of bristling black hair made him an indomitably belligerent figure.

"So it's you and your cursed raiders who jumped us!" he shouted violently as he recognized Ru Ghur.

Ru Ghur wagged his head sadly. "I'm sorry we had to do it. But you shouldn't have gone after radium. That's what brought us after you."

Bork King uttered an angry roar. "Since when do we Companions of Space have to ask your permission as to what we can loot?" he demanded.

"You're no ordinary pirate, Bork," said Ru Ghur shrewdly. "I know your history, that until you were outlawed, you were one of the secret Martian officials called the Guardians of Mars." The fat Uranian leaned forward. "I want to know more about the Guardians of Mars and what they guard. I believe that information would be valuable to me."

"You'll get no information from me!" roared Bork King. "Untie my hands and I'll settle this man to man!"

Captain Future saw the Uranian shake his head. "I'm not a fighting man, Bork," Curt heard him say, and sigh. "I'm just a peaceful old scientist. I hate violence and bloodshed. But since you are obstinate, I fear I'll have to force you to tell me what I want to know. Kra Kol, bring him to my cabin in the Falcon."

Captain Future instantly leaped across the cabin and crouched behind the door, his atom-pistol in his fist.

A grim little smile played over Curt Newton's lips. This was the opportunity for which he had been waiting. The fat Uraninan was going to get a disastrous surprise when he entered his cabin.

Curt Newton seldom had underestimated an opponent of Ru Ghur's caliber. But he did so in this case, and it was his mistake that was disastrous.

For as Ru Ghur and Kra Kol and the big Martian prisoner came along the corridor to the cabin, Curt heard the tramp of their feet suddenly halt.

"There's something wrong!" Ru Ghur's voice exclaimed. "The Lethe-ray machine in there is hardly running at all! That means—"

Captain Future cursed himself for a fool. He should have turned the machine back to normal.

Ru Ghur had darted out of the Falcon.

"Men ,this way!" he yelled. "Our prisoner is loose in the ship!"

Curt Newton bounded out into the corridor. He triggered his atom-gun at Kra Kol, but the Saturnian darted out in time to escape.

Curt rushed past Bork King to the door of the ship. Scores of armed raiders were running toward it. Captain Future was trapped.

CHAPTER V

Space Trail to Danger

A SMALL space-ship, shaped oddly like an elongated tear drop, screamed at highest speed from Earth's Moon toward the spaces beyond Jupiter. It was the Comet, famous ship of the Futuremen. And in it, Joan Randall and Ezra Gurney shared tension with Otho and Grag and the Brain.

"We'll be there in another hour!" Otho called back from the space-stick he had held for long hours of the flight.

"We're too late—away too late," muttered old Ezra discouragement in his wreathed face. "Look how long it's been since the Orion was attacked."

Grag drew his giant metal form grimly erect.

"If that devil Ru Ghur has harmed the Chief, he'll pay!"

"Ru Ghur couldn't know that the Orion's telaudio operator was Captain Future," Joan said hopefully.

But her fine eyes were dark with apprehension. They had all felt that chilling premonition since their discovery that the very ship upon which Curt Newton had gone disguised was the one last attacked by the radium raiders.

Grag paced the cabin restively, frequently peering ahead. The big robot paid no attention even to his pet. Eek, the gray, bearlike little moon pup which usually claimed so much of Grag's attention, pawed unheeded now at his metal feet, then disconsolately retired to curl up beside Oog, the fat little white animal that was Otho's grotesque mascot.

Only the Brain showed no perturbation. It was not that Simon Wright felt no anxiety. But he had known a lifetime of cool self-control.

"We're close to the sector in which the

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attack took place," Simon murmured, for he knew the solar spaces as an ordinary man knows his back yard. And the bucking of the ship meant it was plowing through some of the powerful ether currents that are frequent between Jupiter and Saturn.

"There isn't a sign of the wreck," commented Grag, peering anxiously through the magnifying lookout-lens.

Two cruisers suddenly drove into sight ahead of them, rushing toward the Comet. They bore the insignia of the Planet Patrol.

"Patrol, ahoy!" Ezra spoke quickly into the telaudio, after sliding its tuner to the Patrol wave length. "Marshal Gurney speaking from the Comet. Did you corner the raiders?"

"No, sir," an officer's downcast voice replied. "They got away again. We boxed this whole sector as soon as the alarm came through, but they had slipped past somehow."

"What about the Orion's crew?" Joan asked quickly.

"The radium raiders never leave witnesses," came the answer. "Everybody on the wreck was dead."

"Everybody?" whispered the girl.

"The Chief can't be dead," Otho hastily reassured her. "It'd take more than Ru Ghur and all his devils to kill him."

"Where is the wreck?" Ezra Gurney demanded of the Patrol captain.

"We let it drift and called Jupiter base to send out salvage tugs for it," was the reply. "We're combing this sector for the raiders."

"You let the wreck drift?" Simon Wright exclaimed sharply. "Don't you realize that the ether-currents will suck it into the Sargasso Sea of Space?"

"Good grief, that's right!" exclaimed Grag, dismayed. "The Sargasso's only ten or twelve degrees counter-sunwise from here."

"I guess we overlooked that," admitted the Patrol captain.

"Simon, we've got to reach that wreck!" Joan Randal said quickly. "Curt may be on it, hurt!"

"We may be able to catch it before the currents sweep it into the Sargasso," muttered the Brain. He asked for data of the drifting wreck's course, and calculated swiftly. "There's a chance we can head it off, if we hurry!"

He gave Otho the new bearings. The android instantly jammed the cyc pedal to the floor and twisted the space-stick. The Comet darted away like a flash.

"You chaps stay here and keep huntin' the raiders!" Ezra called to the Patrol cruisers. "Your ships couldn't buck the currents."

"I only hope the Comet doesn't have to buck that inner maelstrom," muttered Otho. "The two times we went into the Sargasso before, we had the Chief's knowledge of the currents to get us out, and then we barely made it."

The Comet was shuddering violently as it tore through the powerful ether currents. It required all Otho's superlative skill to keep the racing ship on its course.

ETHER currents, the name given by spacemen to the complex cosmic phenomenon more accurately known as space warps, were always feared by interplanetary navigators. Most dreaded of all were the powerful currents which had received the name of the Sargasso Sea of Space. Few ships sucked into that area ever returned.

The Futuremen had had enough past experience with the ghostly place to make them dread being drawn into it. And even if they managed to escape it, it would mean a grave delay.

"No sign of the Orion yet," reported Grag from the look-out lens.

"Faster, Otho!" ordered the Brain. "Use all the power we have."

"Hold your hats, then," Otho warned grimly, as his foot pressed the cyc pedal deeper. "We're hitting the big currents now."

The Comet leaped forward with a roar. Giant hands seemed to be batting it this way and that as they entered the stronger currents.

Joan Randall watched tensely with Simon through the windows. So old a comrade was he that she had no thought of the strange contrast of her own slim figure with the boxlike Brain.

The stout metal frame of the Comet creaked and protested. The rockets roared in staccato thunder. Eek fled to the shelter of Grag's shoulder, cowering there terrified.

"There's the wreck ahead!" Grag boomed suddenly.

In a moment they all sighted the wrecked freighter which the mighty currents were bearing at high speed toward the graveyard of space. They rapidly began to overhaul it. Then they saw the name clear on its bows, and that the whole lower deck had been ripped out by an explosion.

"Stand by to cast our grapples, Grag!" shouted Otho. "We'll search the wreck."

He drove the Comet abreast of the wrecked freighter. Grag yanked a lever that released machinery which hurled magnetic grapples and cables toward the wreck. The grapples fastened to the wreck, and winches automatically brought the ship of the Futuremen right beside the Orion.

"I'll try to hold back against the currents as much as possible while you search the

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wreck!" cried Otho. "But make it fast! We're being sucked deeper into the Sargasso by thousands of miles a minute!"

Joan and Ezra already had on their space-suits. Grag and Simon needed no suits, for they were not oxygen-breathers. The four hastily opened the space-door and clambered through the torn side of the Orion.

The wreck was threatening to collapse altogether beneath rushing ether currents. Their time was limited.

Dead bodies lay everywhere. Officers and crew had been ruthlessly gunned down by the radium raiders. Joan ran wildly up to the telaudio room. But there were no bodies in it.

They began a hasty inspection of the slain. When it was completed, they looked at each other with mingled perplexity and relief.

"Curt isn't here!" Joan cried. "Then he's not dead, at any rate!"

The Brain spoke sharply. "Then Ru Ghur penetrated his disguise and discovered he was Captain Future. Everyone else aboard the Orion was killed, which means that Ru Ghur, recognizing Captain Future, took him with him as a prisoner."

"Seems to me that fat Uranian devil would kill Cap'n Future soon as he spotted him, he hates you Futuremen so much!" exclaimed Ezra Gurney.

"Simon's right," boomed Grag. "Ru Ghur's got some devil's scheme in mind that led him to take the Chief prisoner."

Otho's voice broke in upon them, through the short-rang telaudio by which they communicated when in space-suits.

"Don't wait there to talk now! Get back to the Comet—We've got to get out of here now, if ever."

The wreck and the ship of the Futuremen, bound together, were rushing through space at frightful speed despite all Otho's efforts. Stumbling and staggering they clambered back into their own ship.

"Release the grapples, Grag!" cried Otho.

The robot obeyed and the Comet swung clear of the wreck.

"Out of here at full speed!" ordered the Brain. "We're dangerously near the Sargasso!"

The cyclotrons roared a Titan song of power as the Comet plumed a brilliant tail of atomic flame, all its stern rockets blazing as it fought to breast the raging currents. But they were standing still, making no progress. The currents would not let go so easily.

BUT with frequent short blasts of the lateral tubes, Otho was edging the Comet out of the most powerful part of the current. Then they began to fight slowly outward. Soon they were plunging through the lesser currents at high speed.

"This is better," Joan said. "I thought we'd never get free."

The Comet was functioning smoothly now, the raging currents left far behind its tail flame.

Otho handled the controls with skill and dexterity. But he was plainly still filled with apprehension concerning the difficult problem that confronted them.

His concern showed in the way he lost no time in posing his question once the Comet was out of danger.

He raised his voice.

"Now how are we going to find the Chief?" Otho demanded anxiously.

"He is a prisoner of Ru Ghur's raiders," pointed out the Brain. "That means that we'll have to find them."

"Them devils are millions of miles away by now," Ezra Gurney said rather discouragedly.

"And we don't even know that Outlaw World is inside the System!" exclaimed Joan, appalled.

They all felt a little overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem. The Planet Patrol, with its hundreds of cruisers, had been unable to catch Ru Ghur or locate his mysterious base. There was every indication that Outlaw World could not be in the Solar System. And if it were in some alien dimension or star system, a search was hopeless. The vastness of the cosmos would mock their attempts.

"What are we going to do?" burst out Grag. "We can't search the whole universe for Ru Ghur!"

"I still believe that Outlaw World is somewhere between Vulcan an' Pluto," muttered Ezra stubbornly.

"It can't be, Ezra!" expostulated Otho. "The Planet Patrol has searched every world and moon in the System for months without finding it."

"I don't think we can find Ru Ghur's mysterious base, in time to save Curtis," the Brain said thoughtfully. "But Ru Ghur could find us."

"What in thunder do you mean, Simon?" demanded Grag.

Simon Wright briefly explained a daring plan he had in mind.

"It'll be dangerous, but it might work!" Ezra exclaimed.

"It's worth any risk if it gives us a lead to Curt!" Joan cried.

Otho glanced around inquiringly. The Brain gestured with his beams toward the broad window beyond which lay a black abyss in which the asteroid zone and Jupiter and Mars stood out clearly.

"That way, Otho. I'll give you the exact course as soon as I compute it. And hurry!"

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CHAPTER VI

In the Moon Forest

MENACINGLY crouched in the door of the raider cruiser on nighted Leda, Captain Future shot swiftly and accurately at the raiders who were running forward in answer to Ru Ghur's order.

The crackling bolts of atomic energy dropped two of them and the rest fell back for a moment. Curt swung around with the idea of trying to start the cycs and take the Falcon off into space. But Bork King, the big Martian outlaw leader who still stood in the corridor with his hands bound, shouted a warning.

"More are coming from the cyc room! They've got us between them!"

Ru Ghur had, with his usual caution, left the cyclotron crews in the ship, ready to start up the craft at any urgent necessity. Hearing the shooting, those cyc men of the raider ship were pouring up along the corridor.

Captain Future shot a thundering blast down the corridor that drove them back. But he knew it would not be for long. They knew they would rapidly find weapons and come plunging back.

He swung on Bork King.

"You're with me against Ru Ghur's raiders?" he demanded, and at the big Martian's nod. "Then come on—we've got to get out of here!"

In an instant he had torn loose the Martian's wrist bonds. Then, without a moment's hesitation, Curt Newton and the towering Martian darted out of the ship into the planet-lit glade of giant flowers.

It was their only possible chance of escape, Curt knew. To linger a moment longer would be to be hopelessly surrounded by the raiders.

"They're breaking for the forest!" Ru Ghur's voice yelled. "Get them!"

Captain Future flung an atom-blast in that direction from his pistol, in the fierce hope of hitting the Uranian, but knew that he had not.

Gun blasts were crisscrossing the silver-lit glade, reverberating crashingly. Bork King had snatched up the weapon of one of the fallen raiders as they had run past, and the big Martian was triggering with a speed almost matching Captain Future's as they flung themselves toward the shelter of the forest.

Raiders tumbled and died there amid the giant flowers. Fierce voices yelled with rage or shrieked in agony. But the next moment, Curt Newton and the big Martian were in the shadowy shelter of the thickets.

"Come on!" cried Curt. "They'll be after us!"

Roars of rage had broken from scores of throats as the raiders had seen their prisoners escape. The next instant, a ragged volley of atom-blasts tore through the thicket behind them. They heard Ru Ghur's whining yell as the Uranian led his men in pursuit.

Bork King turned fiercely. "I'm not going to run and let that fat toad take my radium!" he snarled.

"Don't be a fool!" cried Curt Newton. "We've no chance against that mob! You won't get your radium back by getting killed!"

That somewhat tempered the rage of the Martian outlaw and he lunged forward with the young Earthman through the dense underbrush.

As they ran beneath the towering tree-flowers, more atom-blasts crackled periously close through the thickets around them. And they heard Ru Ghur's raging voice still calling to his men.

Beneath the towering giant flowers, the jungle of trailing lianas and vines and shrubs was almost impassible to the two men. Curt's heart hammered his ribs from exertion.

He and Bork King burst into a glade of giant lilies, whose trunk-like stalks rose far above their heads to support enormous white flowers that nodded in the silvery planet glow. This glade was criss-crossed by innumerable thick, transparent cables.

"Back!" cried Bork King warningly as he saw the network of glistening cables. "That's a moon spider's web!"

As he uttered the warning, Curt Newton saw a black, monstrous shape rising from a cavity in the ground which was the focus of the huge web.

His hair bristled at sight of the creature. It was a spider whose hairy, bulbous body was of cart horse size, and whose great limbs ran like catlike swiftness over the cables of its web as it charged in their direction.

"Don't shoot—it can't come off its web!" Bork King told Curt as the young Earthman flung up his atom-pistol. "Listen!"

The Martian had turned his gaze away from the monstrous moon spider, which had reached the end of its web and was crouched, glaring at them with evilly opalescent red eyes.

TO THEIR ears came the crash of a large group of men through the brush, and the calling of brutal voices. Their pursuers were close behind them.

"Devils of Deimos, we're cornered!" raged

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the big Martian outlaw. "We can't get across this glade, and before we can get around it through the brush, they'll hear us and will be on us!"

To Curt Newton's mind came a sudden possibility. Instantly, he whipped off his jacket. He lightly scratched his arm with a sharp projection of his atom-pistol, and let it bleed on the jacket. Then he fired his gun into the air.

"Now scream!" he whispered urgently to Bork King. "As though you were being tortured to death!"

Uncomprehending, the Martian nevertheless obeyed. His and Curt's voices rose in shrieks of raw, quivering agony.

Yells of triumph came from the pursuers, as Ru Ghur's men heard the atom-blast and screams, and started beating toward them.

Captain Future flung his bloodied jacket toward the moon spider. The hairy monster pounced on it as it hit the web, and began to tear at it.

"What the devil—", gasped Bork King, still uncomprehending.

"Up this tree flower, quick!" cried Curt Newton in a low voice, dragging the Martian toward one of the giant lilies. "We can hide up there."

They scrambled up the thick trunk until they gained a high crotch from which heavy branches forked out to support the huge flowers. Each of these giant flowers was a thick, tough cup ten feet in diameter. Captain Future clambered into one of the lily cups and his companion followed his example just as Ru Ghur and his men poured into the glade below. They could look right down upon the raiders.

"Look out—there's a moon spider!" yelled the Uranian as he caught sight of the hairy monster in the web. "Kill the beast!"

His own gun flashed a streak of fire. But the huge spider, moving with incredible swiftness as the gun blasted, streaked back along its shining web and disappeared into its pit before the rest could fire.

"Here's the jacket of one of them!" exclaimed Kra Kol, the Saturnian. Moving forward cautiously, he picked up the torn, bloody garment. "The moon spider must have got them when they blundered into its web."

"So that's why they shot and screamed." Ru Ghur nodded. "The beast devoured them before they had a chance to escape."

Captain Future, peering down from the big lily cup high above, saw the fat Uranian looking musingly at the ripped jacket.

"Well," he heard Ru Ghur murmur, "this is a strange end for a long and brilliant career."

"Let's get out of here," muttered Kra Kol. "I don't like these cursed flower jungles."

Ru Ghur shrugged, and led the way back in the direction from which they had come. In a few moments Curt and Bork King slid down to the ground.

"That was close, and it was cursed clever of you," said Bork King to Curt. "What's your name, Earthman?"

Captain Future knew better than to let his real identity be known now. Bork King was an outlaw, one of the Companions of Space. And all that pirate brotherhood hated Captain Future as their bitterest enemy.

Nor could he count on the Martian's gratitude for having helped him escape from Ru Ghur. Hastily, he dissembled.

"I'm Jan Dark," he said. "I was one of Zarastra's crew."

Zarastra had been a famous space pirate captain who had been trapped and destroyed with most of his force by the Planet Patrol only a few weeks before.

"When the Patrol caught Zarastra's ships off Titan, I escaped the wreckage in a space-suit," Curt went on. "That devil Ru Ghur picked me up and was holding me prisoner. He thought Zarastra had buried radium treasure and was going to make me tell about it."

Bork King extended a big hand. "You sure saved my neck, Jan Dark. And I'm not the man to forget a debt."

"You don't owe me anything," Curt denied. "All I want is to get my hands on that Uranian devil for what he did to me."

Even as he spoke there came suddenly to their ears the distant sound of an explosion.

"What the devil?" exclaimed Bork King, his craggy face stiffening. "That came from the camp!"

ALMOST instantly, the explosion was followed by a distant roar of rocket-tubes. And they glimpsed four cruisers rising above the flower forest and darting up into the night sky.

"There go Ru Ghur and his raiders, curse him!" cried the Martian. "If they've taken my radium I'll get them!"

He plunged back toward the camp. Captain Future followed him closely.

"Fiends of Mars!" swore Bork King as they burst into the planet-lit clearing of the flame rose glade. "Look at what they've done!"

The cruisers of the radium raiders were gone. Bork King's men still lay unconscious around the ground beneath the giant flowers, as before. But an explosion had blown out the whole stern of the Martians' cruiser, the Red Hope.

"Ru Ghur exploded your ship's eyes so you and your men couldn't get away!" Captain Future said quickly.

The big Martian was already hastening

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into the battered ship. He ran to the cabin in which his looted radium had been stored. It was gone.

Bork King's broad shoulders seemed to sag, and a look of tragedy came upon his massive face. His eyes were dull with misery.

"Gone—every gram of it!" he muttered. "And we went through months of hardship and danger to gather that radium together."

"It could have been worse," Curt pointed out. "You might have lost your lives, as well as your loot."

"That radium wasn't mere loot!" snapped Bork King. "It's true that we took it by force from its original owners, but it wasn't because of greed."

Captain Future looked at him, puzzled. "I don't understand. I thought you were pirates, like myself."

"We're outlaws, not pirates," retorted the Martian. "Oh, legally we're guilty of piracy. But we had to have radium, and had to use force to get it, since for months Ru Ghur's raiders have swept up the whole supply."

"Are you after radium for the same reason as Ru Ghur?" Curt asked directly.

Bork King shook his head. "I don't know what that Uranian's motive is in gathering radium. Nobody does."

He volunteered no further information as they emerged from the cruiser and began examining the unconscious men, all Martians like their leader. The men lay in drugged coma from the effects of the sleep-gas.

They worked for some time to revive the sleepers, and finally the score of men had all been roused.

Cries of rage broke from them when they learned of the theft of the radium.

"We'll follow that Uranian, blast his whole band, and get the stuff back!" cried a furious young Martian.

Captain Future spoke up quickly. "And I'm with you in that, if you'll have me. I've got my own score to settle with that fat devil."

"We'll be glad to have you with us, Jan," said Bork King promptly. "But it's not going to be easy to follow Ru Ghur. He sabotaged the Red Hope pretty thoroughly. And even if we can get it repaired, we don't know where the raiders' secret base is." He looked at Curt keenly. "Ru Ghur didn't give you any hint of where his Outlaw World is when you were his prisoner, did he?" he asked.

Curt shook his head. "No. All he said was that it is a world of whose existence the System peoples don't dream."

A brooding look crossed Bork King's massive face. "That fits the rumors you hear—that their mysterious Outlaw World lies far outside the Solar System. Yet I can't believe that."

He raised his voice, addressing his men. "We can't make major repairs to the Red Hope here. The best we can do is to patch it up enough to get us to Iskar, the pirate asteroid. We can complete repairs there, then take Ru Ghur's trail!"

The chorus of agreement from the outlaw Martians showed that their trust in their leader was absolute.

Bork King and his second in command, a lanky, solemn Martian named Qi Thir, inspected the wrecked cyclotrons of the Red Hope.

"They did a good job, blast them," growled the leader. "Every one of the eight cycs is blown."

"Number Three and Four cycs only have their heads blown off," spoke up Captain Future, beside them. "They'd be the easiest to repair, and would give us enough power to get the ship off this low-gravity moon."

Qi Thir looked at him with respect. "You know ships. Were you a cyc man with Zarastra?"

CURT NEWTON nodded hastily, seizing on that explanation.

"That's right. Let's look at the hull now. It didn't seem to be ripped, though it's pretty badly bulged."

The explosion had bulged out the heavy triple wall of the Red Hope like tin. Girders had snapped, but the plates had held. Also, the telaudio transmitter had been wrecked. That quenched a hope Curt had had of sending a surreptitious message to the Futuremen of his whereabouts.

"The hull's strained but it ought to hold together for a while," he declared. "How far is it to Iskar?"

"Why, you ought to know where the pirate asteroid is," Bork King said, surprised. "Only twenty degrees Sunwise from here in the inner belt of the asteroid zone."

They began work almost at once upon the wrecked cycs, concentrating their efforts on the two least damaged ones. The solemn Qi Thir and Curt Newton superintended the repairs.

Bork King's Martians worked without pausing for rest, jumping at the slightest command of their big roaring leader, with a sort of fanaticism. Curt sensed a mystery about this outlaw band from Mars.

"That's all we can do here," panted Qi Thir, hours later. "If the gods of Mars are good, we can limp to Iskar on these two cycs."

The day of Leda was dying, the Sun sinking into the faery flower forest and Jupiter rising in huge majesty into the dusking sky.

"Get aboard," Bork King ordered his tired men. "We take off at once."

Captain Future stood beside the big Martian in the pilot-room as the two repaired

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cyclotrons began a ragged, irregular droning that shook the weakened ship. With infinite care, Bork King eased the cyc pedal down until the cycs seemed about to tear themselves apart.

Then he jerked the space-stick back. The Red Hope lurched clumsily up through the giant tree flowers, unsteadily riding the jets of its keel tubes. The ship shivered as Bork King fed power to the stern tubes and sent it limping shakily out into space.

"We got off, at any rate," muttered the big outlaw. "Now for Iskar, then we take Ru Ghur's trail."

The asteroid zone stretched across the firmament ahead of them, a great band of shining specks that in reality was a cosmic jungle of whirling planetoids and spinning meteor swarms.

The Red Hope staggered toward it, and toward the secret pirate asteroid that was the rendezvous of the Solar System's lawless underworld.

Captain Future, looking ahead, realized grimly that he was taking his life into his hands by going into this lair of the men who of all men in the System hated and feared him most.

CHAPTER VII

On the Pirate Asteroid

THROUGH the whirling wilderness of the asteroid zone limped a battered outlaw ship. For hours, the Red Hope had threaded a precarious course deeper and deeper into the great band of rushing planetoids and spinning swarms of meteor drift.

At spasmodic intervals, its rocket-tubes fired weakly, as it clumsily changed course to avoid a dangerous mass of drift. Sometimes the ship barely managed to avoid disaster, for of its two working cyclotrons only one was now functioning with any degree of efficiency.

Captain Future, standing beside Bork King in the pilot-room, listened with an intent expression on his brown face to the throbbing of the cyclotrons.

"Number Three is about gone, but Number Four may hold out a little longer," he declared.

The big, bristling-haired Martian outlaw uttered a blistering oath.

"Curse that devil Ru Ghur for his sabotaging tricks! It's hard enough to navigate this blasted jungle of swarms with full power, let alone with a half-dead space-stick."

The Red Hope had entered one of the densest and most perilous sections of the zone. Curt Newton looked out into a black void crowded with moving crumbs of light. Those innocent sparks were rushing meteors or planetoids whose orbits were unbelievably complicated. Any one of those hurtling masses of stone could instantly destroy the ship.

"I don't see how you can navigate in here at all," Curt admitted. "Meteormeters would be useless in such crowded stuff as this."

Bork King looked at him in surprise. "You surely must know the secret of navigating the zone if you were one of Zarastra's pirate crew."

Captain Future hastily covered his slip. "I was a cyc man—not a pilot. That's why I don't know anything about the piloting end of it."

"Of course." The big Martian nodded, satisfied by the explanation. "Well, Jan, any pirate can navigate the zone, but nobody else can do so safely. Listen to that buzzer."

Curt Newton became aware that from the buzzer in question was coming a constant succession of sharp notes, in distinctly different groups of long and short buzzes.

"Long ago, pirates planted wave-projectors on the 'toids and swarms here in the zone," the Martian outlaw explained. "Each gives off a distinctive individual signal in that specially tuned buzzer. If you know the code of those signals, as all the pilots of the Companions of Space do, you can navigate the zone safely."

"So that's why the asteroid Iskar is such a safe rendezvous for space pirates?" Curt exclaimed, and Bork King nodded.

"Iskar is at the center of a region just choked with swarms, and nobody but pirates ever try to reach it," Bork said, and added thoughtfully, "Of course, some day the Patrol will find it and clean it up, just as they did Pallas and the other pirate asteroids in past times. But until then, it's a safe base for all the Companions of Space."

"I thought you said you weren't a space pirate, Bork," reminded Captain Future, looking at him curiously.

Bork King's massive face darkened. "I'm not, though the Planet Patrol wouldn't agree. Radium is the only thing my boys and I take. We wouldn't have to take that by force, if it weren't for Ru Ghur and his cursed band."

Captain Future did not press his questions further, for he had already learned that Bork King was intensely reserved upon the motives for his activities.

They went deeper into the wilderness of spinning swarms and meteor drift, limping on precariously. Then at last the big Martain

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pointed to a small reddish speck of light not far ahead in the zone.

"That's Iskar," he said.

Blood-red as a glittering ruby, the almost inaccessible pirate asteroid beckoned like an ominous crimson beacon.

"Small, isn't it?" said Bork King. "But not a world in System is as deep with blood and treasure as wild Iskar when the pirate fleets are in."

"Does Ru Ghur never come here?" Curt asked.

The big Martian snorted. "Ru Ghur would be about as welcome in this place as Captain Future!"

CURT smiled grimly. He did not need that to warn him that he was thrusting his head into the jaws of a lion. But he had determined to string along with these Martian outlaws as long as he could, on the trail of Ru Ghur. These outlaws and their pirate friends might succeed in doing what the Planet Patrol had been unable to do, might find Ru Ghur's mysterious secret base. It was worth the risk of the gamble, to Captain Future.

"Ru Ghur's raiders have preyed on the Companions of Space as well as on commercial traffic, for radium," Bork King was going or resentfully. "There isn't a pirate in the System who wouldn't be glad to kill that cursed Uranian."

The Red Hope sagged toward the surface of the crimson asteroid. Now Curt saw that the scarlet hue of the little world came from the dense forests of brilliantly red club mosses which blanketed most of its surface.

At one point, just where day was passing into night on the little sphere, a large clearing had been blasted from the red mosses. A clutter of flimsy metalloy buildings was at the center of this clear space, and lights winked up from them through the gathering dusk.

"Corsair City," grunted Bork King. "And plenty of the Companions must be here tonight, to judge by those ships."

He was bringing the Rep Hope down toward a rough landing field beside the pirate town. There were dozens of space cruisers large and small resting here. All were heavily gunned, and many bore scars of battle.

The crippled Martian ship bumped to a landing in the darkness. Bork King called his crew together in the lower deck.

"I'm going in and bargain with Old Riah for new cycs," he said. "And then I'm going to see if any of the Companions can put us on Ru Ghur's track. Half of you stay here in the ship, Qi Thir, Jan Dark, and the rest of you will go with me."

They emerged into a night of velvet blackness. The sky was wonderful—the matchless night sky of the asteroid zone, with meteors streaking across the blazing heavens like crisscrossing trails of light. The air was soft and was freighted with pungent scents from the moss forests.

Captain Future and the Martians tramped past the rows of parked ships into the pirate town. Corsair City had a single straggling street, midway along which stood a brightly lighted metalloy structure from which came a roaring din of raucous music, and of bellowing voices.

Bork King stopped at a dark yard that was piled with shadowy masses of machines and metals—salvaged parts of space-ships.

"Old Riah's salvage depot," grunted the Martian. "I'm going to bargain with the old rascal for some new cycs." He glanced around. "Qi Thir, you and Jan can go along with the rest to Meteor Jim's place and see what you can learn from the Companions about Ru Ghur. I'll be along later."

Captain Future's pulse thudded faster as he went on with the Martians to the gaudily lighted pirate rendezvous. He stopped with them at the open door of Meteor Jim's and looked inside.

The place was a single big room, brilliantly illuminated by glowing uranite bulbs, and green rial smoke drifted in clouds. There was a long bar along one side, gambling tables along the other, and noisy music-machines going full blast from the rear.

The crowd held his eyes. The place was packed with the most motley, hard-bitten interplanetary throng that could be assembled in the System. Jovians, Venusians, Neptunians, Earthmen, and men of every other planet, all of them wearing weapons and all of them drinking and carousing with equally hard-eyed women. The Companions of Space, the lawless corsairs whose depredations ranged from one end of the System to the other.

"Here's Bork King's band of Martians back!" went up a cheerful cry from a red-faced Earthman. "What luck this time, Qi Thir?"

"No luck," growled the lanky Qi Thir. "We brought back nothing but a battered ship."

Captain Future went to the bar with his Martian companions, and with them drank tawny *sakra* liquor from the Red Planet, their favorite beverage.

A hulking Jovian pirate who stood beside Curt Newton looked at him with curiosity on his green, prognathous face.

"Who are you, Earthman?" he demanded. "I never before saw Bork King's outfit take in anybody who wasn't a Martian."

"I did Bork a favor on Leda and he took me in," Captain Future answered. "My

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name's Jan Dark, and I used to belong to Zarastra's band."

THE reaction was instant and dismaying. The Jovian, abruptly belligerent, glared into Curt's face.

"You're lying!" he bellowed. "You never belonged to Zarastra's band in your life! I was his chief gunner for nine years, and I never saw you before. You're a cursed spy!"

"A spy?"

The shout brought an electric silence and tension into the crowded place. Scores of hands instantly darted toward atom-pistols.

The least added impulse now would send them into immediate, deadly action, of that Captain Future was sure. Above all he had to avoid that.

Luck had failed Captain Future. He had been brought face to face with a real member of Zarastra's crew. But there was nothing to do now but brazen it out. He stared at the Jovian cooly.

"I joined Zarastra before his last voyage and was nearly killed with him in that last battle off Titan," he declared.

"I saw him off on that voyage, though I had to stay behind myself because of a wound," the Jovian said violently. "And you weren't one of his crew!"

"What's all this about a spy?" said a cool, lisping voice from the back of the room, where a big table was reserved for the pirate captains. "Bring that man back here."

Captain Future turned. He felt an instant apprehension as he saw the man who had spoken—a foppish young Venusian who sat alone at the table, his fingers toying with a goblet of swamp grape wine.

"Su Kuan!" thought Curt Newton, appalled. For this handsome young Venusian with the foppish ways was one of the most dangerous pirates in the Solar System.

Captain Future had tangled with him twice, and on the last occasion had nearly been killed by him in a lightning-fast brawl in Uranopolis. If Su Kuan recognized him, despite his disguise and darkened hair, there would be an explosion.

Curt and the Jovian had been herded to the Venusian captain's table by the crowd. And the Jovian repeated his charge.

"This Earthman's a dirty Patrol spy! He claims he belonged to Zarastra's outfit, but he never did."

Curt shrugged. "The Jovian was gunner and I was a cyc man." he told the Venusian calmly. "That's why he never saw me before."

Su Kuan's unfathomable black eyes remained fixed with a faintly puzzled expression on Curt Newton's face.

"I've seen you somewhere before," he murmured. "But I can't remember just where."

"He's a spy, and there's just one end for spies here in Corsair City!" raged the Jovian.

He snatched out his atom-pistol, leveled it at Curt.

There was a flash, a yell of pain. The Jovian staggered backward with a blasted arm, and the hard-faced men gaped incredulously at the atom-pistol that had appeared as though by magic in Captain Future's hand.

"I'm not used to being bullied and I don't like it," Curt said harshly. "Anybody else here want trouble?" He was playing the part of a swaggering pirate to the hilt, for in that course alone lay safety now.

"What the devil is going on here?" roared a deep bass voice. "What do you mean by ganging up on one of my men?"

Bork King was pushing through the crowd, his craggy red face dark with menace and his hand on the hilt of his atom-pistol.

"Your man, Bork?" repeated Su Kuan, his eyebrows lifting. "Then you can vouch for this Earthman?"

"Of course I can," snapped Bork King. "Jan Dark saved my life a couple of times over on Leda, when that devil Ru Ghur and his raiders jumped me."

Su Kuan shrugged. "If you vouch for him, that's enough for me. Though I still wish I could remember where I'd seen him."

Curt Newton did not. He knew what would happen if Su Kuan did remember. He knew the wolf howl that would go up from this fierce throng. All would vie for the honor of killing their greatest enemy, Captain Future!

He had seen their eagerness a moment before when he had been accused of being a spy. Their itchy hands had lost no time in darting for their atom-pistols. They were spoiling for a kill. They would need no urging to go into action once the word was spoken.

Bork King was telling Su Kuan of how Ru Ghur's raiders had robbed him on Jupiter's flower moon.

"I'm going to find that Uranian if I have to search the whole universe for him!" the big Martian swore. "I thought maybe you might have an idea where his base is."

Su Kuan shook his head. "There's nothing I'd like better than to help you catch Ru Ghur. But none of us can figure where his base is. Ak Az and Blacky Malone will be back with their bands tomorrow. They might know something."

Bork King nodded. "I'll drop back tomorrow night."

As Captain Future turned away with Bork King, he had an uncomfortable feeling that Su Kuan's eyes were still following him speculatively.

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CHAPTER VIII

Disastrous Discovery

BORK KING, Captain Future, and Bork's followers had headed for the door when a young Martian pirate wearing two heavy atom-guns stepped into their path. He had been watching Bork with smoldering eyes ever since his entrance.

"So you're Bork King?" he said, in a voice thickened by drink. "I've been wanting to meet the greatest traitor to Mars who ever lived."

Captain Future was startled by the haunted look of misery that suddenly came in Bork King's bleak eyes.

"They still talk about you on Mars," the young Martian sneered accusingly. "About Bork King, the only one of the Guardians of Mars who ever betrayed his trust.

"What are you talking about?" Su Kuan asked curiously.

The young Martian never took his fierce eyes off Bork King's face as he answered.

"This man Bork King held the highest, most sacred trust that the Martian people can bestow. He betrayed it and endangered his whole world. His name is cursed by every Martian alive, even by pirates like myself."

Su Kuan made a gesture of indifference. "We don't care here on Iskar what a man did before he was outlawed. Drop it."

Bork King, with that haunting misery still in his eyes, turned away without answering.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he muttered to Curt Newton.

Out in the velvet darkness, under that sky of golden, flashing meteors, Curt looked up at the big outlaw curiously.

"Bork, what did that young Martian mean when he accused you of bertaying Mars. Is that why you were outlawed?"

"Yes, that's why," Bork King answered tonelessly. "I was one of the Guardians of Mars who hold the greatest secret trust on the Red Planet. I was accused of failing that trust." His voice grew harsh. "They outlawed me from Mars, but Qi Thir and a few others who still believed in me stuck to me. We fitted a cruiser and took to the outlaw trail, and that's all."

Captain Future sensed omissions in the explanation. Bork King had not explained why he and his Martians stole only radium, and why they hated Ru Ghur so intensely. But of one thing, Captain Future was sure.

"Bork," he said positively, "I know a man when I see one. You're no traitor."

The big Martian looked down at him sharply. His voice softened as he said quietly, "Thanks, Jan."

They started back out of Corsair City, following the dark street beneath the meteor-blazing sky to the landing field.

"Old Riah will truck out the new cycs I bought for the Red Hope," explained the Martian. "I paid him the last of a few Titanian moon jewels I had tucked away for the stuff."

The reached the Red Hope just a little before two battered rocket-trucks lumbered up to it to deliver the eight cyclotrons that Bork King had bought.

The cyclotrons were not new. They had been salvaged from wrecked ships and had seen much wear, but were still serviceable and far better than none.

The crew started in that same night to install them in place of the exploded ones in the ship. Qi Thir and the other Martians worked with unabated speed because each was well aware that not until the repairs were completed could they take Ru Ghur's trail and make a desperate attempt to recover their lost radium.

"I still don't see how we're to find the Uranian," Curt Newton said. "So far, we've found no clues to his trail here."

"Two other big pirate bands will be back tomorrow night, remember—Malone's and Ak Az'," Bork King reminded. "I'm hoping one of them will have heard something."

All during the next day, Captain Future helped the Martians in the labor of installing the cyclotrons and repairing the strained hull by welding in new girders and plates. By nightfall, the work was almost finished.

Curt Newton felt the precariousness of his position each moment. The danger lay in Su Kuan. At any moment, the foppish Venusian pirate captain might realize that the new man in the outfit of Bork King, the Martian, was that arch-enemy of the Companions of Space, Captain Future.

Yet when Bork King went back to the rendezvous of the rowdy pirates that night, Curt went with him. He had to run the risk, on the chance of hearing something that would give him a clue to Ru Ghur's Outlaw World, something Bork might miss.

Bork had left Qi Thir and the crew in the Red Hope.

"There's too much chance of getting into fights in Meteor Jim's," he had said to them. "And we can't afford trouble."

The lanky Qi Thir had nodded agreement. "We don't like the place anyway," he had said laconically.

METEOR JIM'S was going full blast when the big Martian outlaw and Captain Future entered. Money, jewels, slugs of rare

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metals changed hands over the gambling tables. The Companions of Space never knew whether or not their next foray would be the last one, and always squandered their loot with the thought that the next voyage might bring the inevitable end under the guns of the Planet Patrol.

Curt Newton and Bork King found that the corsair captains were not yet here. Waiting for them, they stood at the bar drinking *sakra*.

Curt Newton felt as though he were in the midst of a den of wolves who would turn and rend him at the slightest suspicion of his identity. But he remained outwardly nonchalant in the midst of the motley crew from all planets, as the night of carousing roared toward its climax.

A hulking gray Saturnian who was far gone in fungus brandy raised his bull voice through the din.

"From Mercury to Pluto!" he bawled.

It was a call for the old song of the Companions of Space, the dreaded pirate song that at some time or another had sent shivers through every planet in the System.

And it was roared out now from a hundred throats, the song of men without a world who lived only for battle, loot and sudden death.

> From Mercury to Pluto,
> From Saturn back to Mars,
> We'll fight and sail and blaze our trail
> In crimson through the stars!

The roaring, swinging chant went on in verse after verse—the anthem of the lost.

> We'll cram our holds with plunder
> From every world and moon—

Great corsairs of the past had sung that song before they met flaming end in space. John Haskin, that first great corsair chieftain who had made Pallas his stronghold, had sung it.

Lan Rahsh, "the Butcher", had sung it, and so too had that fabulous young Earthman corsair who had been Ezra Gurney's younger brother, and whom long ago Ezra had grimly tracked down and dueled to death in space.

They had all sung it, and they had all died, Captain Future thought tightly. He himself had, with the Futuremen, helped clean out Pallas. This new pirate nest also would be destroyed in time, but that must wait until after they had trailed and destroyed Ru Ghur and his raiders.

Su Kuan came in with two other pirate captains just as the pirate song ended with a crash. Again, Captain Future stiffened with tension as he and Bork King went back to the table reserved for the kings of the buccaneers.

The two other pirate leaders were Ak Az, a gloomy-eyed Plutonian, and "Blacky" Malone, a dark, wolf-faced Earthman.

"Hello, Bork!" Malone greeted gustily. "We just got in from a pounce on Saturn's smaller moons, and we've got enough loot to celebrate!"

Su Kuan's inscrutable eyes glanced again at Curt Newton's nonchalant face, as the Venusian leader explained Bork King's resolve.

"Bork wants to track down Ru Ghur and thought maybe one of you would have heard something of where the Uranian has his base."

Ak Az, the Plutonian, shook his head. "No one has the faintest idea where that Outlaw World is."

Blacky Malone swore viciously. "If I knew where the cursed Uranian had his base, I'd have been there and blasted him long ago."

Bork King looked disappointed. "I'm going to find Ru Ghur if I have to comb the whole universe for him! But I thought one of you might be able to put me on his trail."

"Ru Ghur has been cleaning up more radium ships," Malone told him. "We heard it an hour ago on the telaudio news."

"Maybe," said Bork King hopefully, "if I knew what part of space he was operating in, I could go out and find him before he returned to his base."

"The news will be on again in a few minutes," Malone said. "You can hear it for yourself."

Bork King had a teluadio receiver brought to the table and turned it on. They soon heard the voice of a newscaster speaking from Jupiter.

"Another radium robbery in space has just been disclosed!" was the second item. "The Pluto-Venus liner has just made port at Jupiter and reports that last week it was held up in space near the orbit of Saturn and robbed of a shipment of radium that was in its cargo. The radium raiders, contrary to their usual custom, killed no one aboard the liner. They merely destroyed the ship's telaudio so that an alarm could not be sent out."

BORK KING uttered an explosive exclamation.

"That's not one of Ru Ghur's jobs at all! I held up that liner last week, though the blasted Uranian devil did later take the radium away from me."

Malone swore. "Then this news isn't going to help you. But why the devil did you leave all the crew and passengers alive?"

"I don't murder helpless people," Bork King answered shortly.

"Bork, listen!" Captain Future said sharply as the newscaster continued.

"Speaking of radium," said the newscaster,

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"word has just come of a fabulous radium strike made by two daring Earth prospectors on the wild asteroid Zuun, at the west end of its equatorial valley. Their courage in braving the dangers of Zuun was rewarded by discovery of a rich radium pocket, which they believe to contain several million dollars' worth of the high-test ore."

Bork King's eyes snapped with excitement. "Say, there's our chance to pick up radium and catch Ru Ghur at the same time!"

"What do you mean?" asked Su Kuan.

"Ru Ghur is sure to learn of that radium soon," the big Martian explained excitedly. "He has an uncanny way of finding radium. He'll come to Zuun after it—and we'll be there waiting for him! We'll go right now, and grab the radium, then lay a nice little trap for Ru Ghur."

Blacky Malone uttered a word of warning. "How do you know that this business on Zuun isn't a trap? There's something a little fishy about making a public announcement of a rich radium strike."

"I agree," rumbled the Plutonian corsair. "It sounds to me like the kind of smart trap that would be prepared by Captain Future."

Curt Newton saw a sudden change in Su Kuan's face as he heard that name—Captain Future. The Venusian pirate stiffened, glaring at Curt with suddenly narrowed eyes. Then, with blurring speed, his hand darted to draw his atom-pistol.

Instantly Captain Future realized that the chance mention of his name had supplied the key to Su Kuan, and that the Venusian corsair had recognized him!

CHAPTER IX

World of the Cave-Apes

ONLY two days before the Comet had flown toward the asteroid zone so that the Futuremen might carry out the desperate plan of action the Brain had conceived.

"Curtis is a prisoner of Ru Ghur's Radium raiders," Simon had explained. So we must find the raiders quickly. And since we haven't an idea where their Outlaw World is, we must let them find us. We'll go to some wild asteroid, and then let the news get out that we're prospectors who have located a rich radium deposit. Ru Ghur and his band will come to take the radium away from us—and we'll be waiting for them."

Otho's green eyes flashed. "And we'll wring everything we want to know out of that cursed Uranian, and rescue the Chief!"

"Yes," boomed Grag, with indestructible confidence in Captain Future, as he saw Joan's anxious face, "we'll find the Chief all right."

"What asteroid was you figgerin' on, Simon?" asked Ezra Gurney.

"It must be some uninhabited, unexplored asteroid," Simon declared. "I believe Zuun would be best for our purpose."

Ezra's face lengthened. "That 'toid they call the World of the Cave Apes? They say those critters are sure death."

"We'll find a way to keep them off," promised the Brain. "And by selecting Zuun we will avoid arousing Ru Ghur's suspicions."

When the Comet entered the asteroid zone, it required all Otho's skill to pilot the little ship through the dangerous meteor swarms and planetoid-families. They had to proceed with care, though they chafed at any delay.

At last, the little ship approached Zuun. The rocky asteroid, circled by its small "moon", presented a bleak and forbidding landscape of hills and chasms, as they dropped toward its sunlit side.

"That long valley on the equator looks like a good spot to set up our trap," the Brain decided. "Land near that chasm, Otho."

When the Comet landed the Futuremen brought out the spare hull-plates the ship carried, and bolted them together into a small metal shack. They erected this little structure close by the edge of the chasm.

Eek and Oog, glad to escape from the ship, frisked beneath their feet. By the time the work was finished, the short day of Zuun was waning. On the telaudio of the Comet Ezra Gurney called the distant headquarters of the Planet Patrol, with a request.

"They'll do as we ask," Ezra said, when he turned off the telaudio. "The telaudio news services will broadcast an item about the rich radium strike made by a couple of prospectors here on Zuun."

"That will bring Ru Ghur's band quickly," Simon declared.

He had Grag and Otho carry certain instruments and machines out of the ship and into the shack.

"Now we've got to hide the Comet," he told them. "Ru Ghur would recognize it instantly."

"We can conceal it in that chasm," Otho suggested.

"That's a good idea," approved the Brain. "But hurry, for it's nearly dark and the cave apes will soon be coming out."

During the day they had seen no sign of the fearsome monsters. But they knew that the great cave apes inhabited the labyrinth of caves and chasms below, preying on the rich cavern fauna, and emerging only by night.

Otho and Grag entered the Comet and dropped the ship slowly into the narrow

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chasm, landing it on a wide ledge covered by white fungi.

"The cave-apes won't bother it here," Otho declared, "for I'll turn on the auxiliary generator to give the hull an electric charge. Any of 'em who touch it will get a shock."

"Speaking of the cave apes, here they come now!" cried Grag.

Otho jumped to the port-hole, and uttered a sharp exclamation. The darkness was almost complete, but enough thin starlight sifted down to allow him to see the incredible creatures who were clambering up onto the ledge from the lower depths.

There were more than a dozen of the monsters—huge, white-skinned apelike giants. The adult males and females were at least eighteen feet in height, and even the young were seven feet high. Their shambling legs and arms, round heads, and phosphorescent eyes gave them a peculiarly terrifying appearance.

The cave apes were hunting through the white fungi for large black cave crabs, which they pounced upon and devoured. So far, they had not noticed the Comet at the back of the ledge.

"What are we going to do?" Grag exclaimed. "We can't get back up without them seeing us. Shall we try our atom-pistols?"

"They say a cave ape's hide is almost proof against any ordinary weapon, "Otho said. "By the time we killed one, the rest would be on us."

"Well, we can't stay here," Grag declared. "Use those brains you're always bragging about, and dope out some way to get through them."

OTHO'S eyes lit up with a gleam of inspiration.

"Grag, I've got it! You're about the size of one of those cave ape cubs—same massive build, same round head, same glowing eyes. Paint you white, and you'd pass for one sure as shooting."

"Is this a time for you to start insulting me?" roared Grag.

"No, I'm serious," Otho declared. "We'll put a coat of white paint on you, then you pick me up and tuck me under your arm and start up to the surface. They'll figure you're one of their kids, and won't stop you."

"I won't do it!" Grag exclaimed indignantly. "Not if we stay here forever, will I let you make a monkey out of me like that."

"Simon and Joan and Ezra are waiting," Otho reminded. "If we don't return soon, they'll come after us—and walk right into these monsters."

That persuaded Grag. But the robot continued to growl with indignation as Otho rapidly applied a coat of instant-drying white

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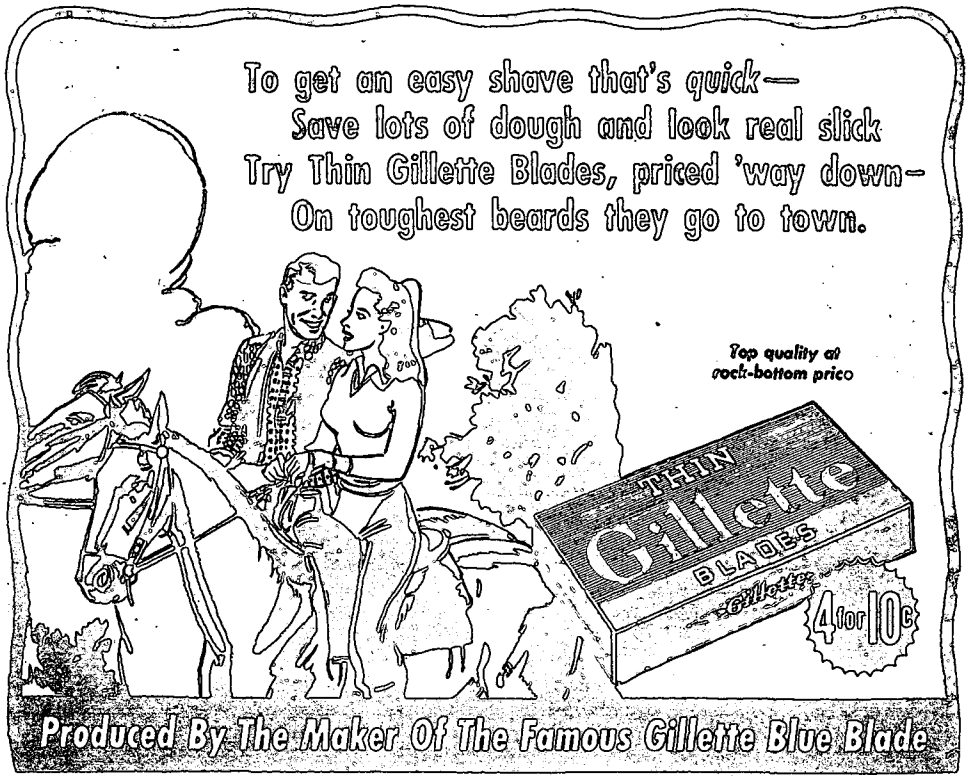
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paint to his massive metal body.

"Why, you're a dead ringer for a young cave ape!" Otho chuckled when he had finished.

They silently emerged from the ship. Closing the door, Otho touched the switch that would give the ship a protective electric charge.

Then Grag picked up Otho and, with the android tucked under one arm, started along the fungi-clad ledge toward the rocky path that led up to the surface. The dusk was deeper now. And the huge cave apes hunting through the fungi paid no attention to the disguised robot.

"Oh-oh!" he muttered then in sudden alarm. "Here comes one of them after us!"

A full-grown female cave ape was advancing after them through the fungi. But instead of showing rage or anger, the creature was making loud clucking sounds.

"Grag, some mother ape has lost her young one, and, wants to adopt you!" exclaimed Otho.

He shook with laughter, despite the danger. But Grag, thoroughly alarmed, raced up the path at a rate the huge creature behind them could not match. When they clambered out of the chasm, Otho doubled up with mirth.

"Grag, aren't you going to wait for mama?" he called to the robot, who was already speeding away.

When they reached the metal shack, little Eek recoiled in alarm from his changed master.

"How the blazes did you turn white, Grag?" demanded Ezra Gurney. "For a minute, I thought you was one of them cave apes."

"So did they," chuckled Otho, and told them of his stratagem.

That gave the Brain an idea.

"We'll string a wire with an electric charge around here, to keep off the cave apes," he said. "Then we've got to set up detection fields to warn us when Ru Ghur comes, and the damping wave projector that we'll use to overpower his band."

It was not long after they had strung a charged wire around the shack, when two of the huge cave apes came shambling through the dim starlight. Joan exclaimed in horror as she glimpsed them, and Eek huddled into a corner and shivered.

But when the cave apes, touched the charged wire, they fled with brutish howls of terror. None came near the rest of the night, while Simon and Otho worked to set up the detection field instruments and the big, spherical damping wave generator.

"Now all we can do is wait," said the Brain. "But Ru Ghur will come. He's engaged in some secret project that requires all the radium he can gather. He'll be here when he hears of a rich strike."

"Simon, what is Ru Ghur planning to do with all that radium?" Joan asked. "Have you any idea?"

"Radium produces almost unlimited atomic power," the Brain answered thoughtfully. "Ru Ghur has some project in mind that will require vast quantities of power. But what it is, is as much of a riddle as the location of his Outlaw World."

THEY waited through all that day and night, standing watches and keeping constant lookout at the ship detector. But no ship came. Joan began to get discouraged. This waiting, when Captain Future might be in deadly danger, was wearing on her nerves.

Night came again. Joan restlessly paced the floor of the little metal shack. If this night passed without Ru Ghur's coming, she would beg them to return to an active search, no matter how hopeless it might be.

"The little moon is rising," Otho remarked, from the window. "The cave apes will be coming out soon and—"

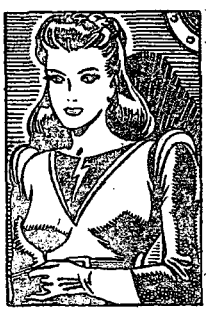
He was interrupted by a low, whirring sound from the ship detector. They sprang to the instrument. Its aura had been cut by a landing vessel.

"A ship has landed up in the valley!" Simon exclaimed. "Our trap has worked! Make ready, now!"

Hastily they made final preparations to spring their scientific amubuscade on the men who were stealthily approaching.

CHAPTER X

Planetoid Trap



HARDLY had Curt Newton realized that Su Kuan had finally recognized him as Captain Future, back on the pirate asteroid, than he had acted with the swiftness of thought.

The Venusian, deadly as a swamp adder wasted no time in accusations. As soon as he had discovered the identity of "Jan Dark," he had gone for his atom-pistol.

He had the advantage of the initiative, and his weapon was already out of its sheath. The others at the table were too frozen by the utter unexpectedness of the action to move or speak.

Captain Future drew and shot with all the speed of which his lightning reflexes were capable.

"What the devil—" Blacky Malone had begun to ejaculate, when two crashing bolts

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of white atomic fire drowned out his stupefied exclamation.

Curt Newton's blast drilled the Venusian's breast, for he shot to kill.

Su Kuan's atom-pistol exploded before he could quite raise it, and the bolt of atomic energy tore a gaping hole in the floor a few yards away.

The Venusian sagged across the table lifeless. For a moment, the thundering echoes of the two guns were succeeded by a frozen silence. Then came wild cries.

"Gods of space! That Earthman has dropped Su Kuan!"

Pirates of the Venusian's crew surged forward out of the crowd with roaring shouts of rage, lusting for vengeance. Curt Newton swung, his atom-pistol covering them. "Don't draw those guns!" he barked.

His eyes were gray slits, his dark face as thought set in metal, as he faced them.

Bork King, recovering from his shocked surprise, yanked out his own weapon.

"I'm backing Jan Dark!" he growled harshly. "Su Kuan drew on him without any provocation and Jan shot in self-defense. You all saw it!"

Curt saw the crowd hesitate doubtfully. He knew that life itself hung in the balance now. For he also knew that if Su Kuan had lived long enough to shout out that he was Captain Future that the pirate throng would have torn him to bits.

"It was a straight man-to-man fight and by all the laws of the Companions, Jan Dark was right in killing him!" Bork King was bawling. "Su Kuan drew on him without any reason whatever, I tell you!"

"There must have been some reason for Su to do that!" protested Blacky Malone, glaring at Curt Newton.

"I had an old feud with Su Kuan," Captain Future said, in clipped tones. "But he didn't recognize me at first and I didn't want any trouble unless he asked for it. He asked for it—and got it."

But he was well aware that all that saved him from the vengeance of the Venusian pirate's crew was a tradition of the Companions of Space, the rough, wild corsair law that a fair fight between two men was the final verdict on all differences between them.

"Let's get out of here, Jan," muttered Bork King in Curt's ear.

They sheathed their atom-pistols, and stalked boldly toward the door. No hand was raised to stop them, though bitter hatred was plain in the faces of the dead captain's crew. But those men had not felt enough affection for Su Kuan to make them carry the matter further with two deadly fighting men.

Outside, Bork King mopped his brow and said shortly.

"We'd better get off Iskar quick and not come back till Su Kuan's men cool down! What the devil was it Su had against you anyway, Jan?"

Curt shrugged. "It was an old feud, as I said. He tried to kill me on Uranus a few years ago and I wounded him instead. He didn't recognize me at first. But when he did—you saw the rest."

"I saw that you're the fastest man with an atom-gun I ever run across," declared Bork King flatly.

As they hurried toward the Red Hope, the big Martian outlaw explained his intentions.

"We'll go right now to Zuun, that asteroid where the radium strike was reported, and set up a trap for Ru Ghur."

A half-hour later the Red Hope rose from Iskar and started in a counter-sunwise direction through the asteroid zone.

CURT NEWTON'S mind was busy as the ship threaded its way through the jungle of drifts and rushing planetoids. He believed Malone had been right in his suspicions, and that the reported radium strike on Zuun was a trap for Ru Ghur. And if so, he was sure the Futuremen had set that trap. It was their kind of device.

If they were on Zuun he would have a chance to rejoin them and help them spring the trap on the Uranian.

But Bork King and his Martians were a complication. They would be furious when they learned that "Jan Dark" was Captain Future. And Curt Newton liked Bork King, outlaw or not. He had no intention of leading the Martians into a trap.

"If I do find the Futuremen on Zuun," he thought, "we'll let Bork King and his crew go. I won't betray that big Martian's trust in me. Though he must be made to understand he must stop looting radium.

The Red Hope forged through the dangers of the asteroid zone. So far, they had been navigating by the wave code of the Companions of Space, but presently the buzzer navigation signals ceased. They were entering a region which even pirates rarely visited. They proceeded with great care.

They curved around a spinning ball of sparks that was a big swarm of meteor drift, and then curved back to avoid another swarm. Finally, after hours of flight, Bork King pointed ahead into the maze of creeping specks of light.

"That's Zuun!" he said.

The asteroid Zuun was companioned by a small planetoid which revolved around it like a small moon. Captain Future peered intently at their destination.

Zuun was a mere big ball of rock, rumpled in jagged hills and seamed by dark crevices and chasms. It had a thin atmos-

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phere, but no vegetation except low, dusty clumps of lichens.

"Head around its equator at low altitude," muttered Bork. "The valley where the prospectors struck radium lies almost on the equator, according to that newscast."

The Red Hope slid down past Zuun's tiny "moon' and throbbed low above the jagged hills. They traversed the sunlit half of the spinning asteroid and were aproaching its twilight band when they sighted the long, shallow valley they sought.

"Land the ship!" Bork King directed quickly. "I can see the propsectors' camp. They'll see us too if we go any further."

Captain Future had also glimpsed through the dusk a small metalloy building further up the valley. Then their ship sank quickly downward.

It landed upon the valley floor. By the time they had belted on their atom-guns and emerged from the ship, complete darkness had come.

The thin air was rapidly growing cold. A night wind rustled the dusty lichens. This rocky little world seemed drear and desolate.

"We'll take ten men with us," Bork declared. "Qi Thir can stay with the rest to guard the ship."

Curt Newton, Bork King and their small force started off on foot. They tramped through the chilly, windy dark up the valley, avoiding the numerous chasms and gorges that split the rock floor.

"Something moving ahead!" Curt Newton exclaimed suddenly in a whisper, drawing his atom-gun. "See there?"

"Get down!" Bork whispered back sharply. "It's a couple of the cave apes coming out!"

Out of the gorge not far ahead, two great shapes clambered into the thin starlight. They stood dimly outlined in it for a moment. Curt felt his skin crawl at the sight. The two hunched ape figures were incredibly gigantic. He guessed them as at least eighteen feet high—huge white monsters who stood sniffiing the wind.

Then the great ape creatures shambled off into the darkness, toward the low hills that walled the valley. Curt Newton drew a long breath of relief.

They went on, more cautiously. Suddenly pale light illumined the whole rocky valley. The "moon" of Zuun was rising, casting an effulgent luminosity upon the wild landscape. They could clearly see the prospectors' mettaloy building not far ahead. And a light came from a window in it.

BORK KING shook his head.

"I can't figure how these prospectors have managed to keep off the cave apes. He stopped short. "There is something fishy about all this, at that. Maybe it's a trap. I'm going to find out."

"What do you intend to do?" Curt asked anxiously.

"I'm going to send one of the men back to the Red Hope with orders for Qi Thir to take the ship off this asteroid for just a few minutes," Bork declared. "If Planet Patrol officers are ambushed in that shack, they know our ship landed here. When they hear it take off, they'll come running out, and we'll be waiting here in ambush for them."

Captain Future didn't like this idea at all.

"It might mean a bloody battle for us," he objected.

"No, it won't," Bork King declared. "I don't go in for bloodshed. We'll have the drop on them and can handle them without any killing."

He gave an order to one of his Martians, and the man sped back toward their ship.

Curt and Bork King drew their atom-guns and started a stealthy progress toward the gleaming shack. They crawled up behind the rocks at its back, and waited.

In a few minutes there was a distant roar of rocket-tubes. Then they glimpsed the Red Hope soaring into the sky on a plume of rocket flame.

Instantly, the door of the metal shack was flung open and a group of figures burst out of it.

"They turned around and left, blast them!" Curt heard a great voice boom angrily. "They must have smelt the trap!"

Grag's voice! Curt knew instantly then that the Futuremen had set this trap for Ru Ghur.

Bork King and his Martians had sprung forward, their atom-guns covering the little group from the shack.

"Don't any of you touch a weapon!" ordered the Martian. "Turn around and face us!"

But the next moment, Bork uttered a startled cry.

"Devils of Deimos, it's the Futuremen!"

He had seen that the group consisted of a giant robot, a white-skinned, lithe-looking man, a boxlike unhuman creature poised in mid-air, a slim girl, and a white-haired man in Planet Patrol uniform.

There was a throbbing silence as the thunderstruck Futuremen faced the Martians.

From behind the Martians, Curt Newton spoke swiftly.

"Bork, you and all your men drop your atom-guns. I have you covered!"

Ezra Gurney heard, and the old Patrol veteran uttered a glad shout as he recognized that voice.

"Captain Future!"

"Chief!" cried Otho. "Thank space! We thought maybe you were a goner!"

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Joan Randall was running forward with a glad cry.

But Bork King, who had turned, was staring at Curt Newton in frozen shock.

"Captain Future—you?" he mumbled.

"Bork," Curt said hastily, "this is no treachery on my part! I'm only after Ru Ghur. You're free to go with your men."

But the big Martian outlaw now was the prey of a blind, unreasoning anger that seemed about to break into fatal violence. He and the other Matrians were raising their weapons they had not let fall, for in their surprise they had ignored Curt's order.

"I see it all now!" Bork King exclaimed hoarsely. "I see why Su Kuan tried to kill you when he recognized you. You've been after all of us, myself and my boys as well as Ru Ghur!"

"Bork, no!" Curt cried. "I stayed with you only in hopes of getting on the trail of Ru Ghur and his Outlaw World. If I'd wanted to do for you, would I have helped you on Leda?"

The big Martian stood there glaring. Then in that moment of tense silence came a sound that startled them all—the sound of rocket-tubes, a thunderous crescendo from the sky. Curt Newton glanced up swiftly. He glimpsed four sleek, grim black cruisers over Zuun.

"Ru Ghur and his raiders!" he shouted. "He's come for the radium he thinks is here!"

THE four cruisers were circling as though inspecting the moonlight scene.

"Chief, we've got a damping wave generator set up that'll overpower the raiders when they land!" Otho said hastily.

"Into the shack, then!" Curt ordered. "They mustn't see us or they'll not land."

"If they land, my boys and I will take care of them!" Bork King growled.

The Martian outlaw had forgotten his passionate accusation of Captain Future. The coming of the bitterly hated Uranian had wiped all else from all their minds.

"They're coming down!" Curt warned. "Be ready to switch on the damping wave the minute they land, Otho!"

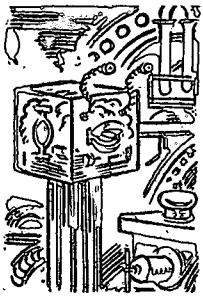
The four cruisers were diving in a screaming swoop. Abruptly their heavy atom-guns blasted energy downward. The brilliant beams tore through one end of the metal shack and gouged a path across the valley as the four cruisers screamed low overhead.

The shack was a wreck, the wave generator and other machines fused into shapeless metal. Curt had yanked Joan and Otho back in time to escape injury, but all were momentarily stunned.

"Somethin's gone wrong!" shrilled Ezra Gurney. "He's found out this is a trap!"

CHAPTER XI

Catastrophe from the Sky



SUCH a sudden reversal of their hopes was staggering. They had been so sure that Ru Ghur and his band were walking unsuspectingly into the ambush. And now the Uranian with his diabolical omniscience, was striking to destroy them.

"Out of the shack!" yelled Curt. "They'll finish this place in their next swoop!"

They burst out of the wrecked shack into the silvery light.

"There comes the Red Hope!" Bork King yelled. "Qi Thir is crazy! He can't fight four cruisers!"

The Martians on the outlaw ship had glimpsed the attack and were rushing to oppose the raider cruisers. The Red Hope and the four cruisers spun in a wild battle, atom-guns belching deadly beams.

It was hopeless. Concentrated beams of four ships tore into the Red Hope and sent it spinning down, to crash in the hills north of the valley. Ru Ghur's four cruisers came racing back toward the metal shack.

"They'll see us here in the open!" Captain Future cried. "Make for that chasm! It's the only cover!"

Bork King maddened by the sight of his ship and comrades shot down, was raging like a crazy man. But Curt pushed him on toward the chasm, with the roar of rockets behind them swelling like the thunder of doom. They reached the rim of the chasm, whose jagged, broken rock promised concealment and shelter.

"Down, Bork!" shouted Captain Future. "We can't fight four cruisers with a few pistols! Once down there, we can get to the Comet."

Otho, with his wonderful agility, had already swarmed down to a projecting ledge. The Brain was gliding down after him.

Above the rocket-roar of diving ships came the crash of atomic beams destroying the shack completely. The raider ships circled back.

"They're after us now!" roared Grag. He shook his fists at the sky, his other arm holding Eek and Oog.

"Get down there, so I can hand Joan down to you!" Curt Newton ordered the furious robot. "Hurry!"

Grag slid over the edge, landed heavily on the ledge which Ezra and Otho and the Martians already had reached.

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"Here they come!" screamed Joan.

Captain Future whirled, saw that Ru Ghur's ships were rushing back low over the valley, their bright, deadly beams leaping ahead of them. Before he could get over the edge with Joan, the beams would hit them. He grabbed her and flung himself to one side with her, in frenzied swiftness.

The next moment, the whole asteroid seemed to erupt as the concentrated atomic beams of four ships tore shatteringly into the rock. Stunned, Curt Newton was flung to his face, his body protecting the girl as bits of rocks showered upon them.

Dimly he heard a thunderous crash of falling rock that drowned even the roar of rockets. His brain rocked, and he felt as though he were floating in space.

Dizzily he came back from semi-consciousness to a foggy awareness that he was lying half-buried by rock fragments, with Joan still held protectingly in his arms.

"Joan, are you hurt?" he asked hoarsely.

"No, only dazed," she gasped.

Captain Future struggled to his feet in sudden alarm. His atom-pistol had been knocked from his hand, and he bent to search for it.

"Don't look for it," said a smooth voice a few feet away from him. "If you do, we'll have to kill you both, and I wouldn't like to do that."

Curt knew that unctuous, purring voice! He turned, and stiffened at the scene that confronted him in the silvery moonlight.

The blasting beam had torn tons of rock from this part of the valley floor, and this whole section of the chasm had collapsed. The Futuremen, Ezra, Bork King and his Martians were entombed!

Ru Ghurs' cruisers of Ru Ghur had landed while Curt lay stunned. And Ru Ghur himself, with a score of his motley raiders, stood before Curt and Joan.

The fat, bald, yellow Uranian had an atom-pistol in his hand. His moonlike face was bland and beaming, but his small eyes narrowed as he surveyed Captain Future and the girl.

"So you and Bork King were here with the Futuremen, helping them set this little trap for me?" he said to Curt.

"It's that prisoner from the Orion who got away from us with the Martian on Leda!" Kra Kol, his fishy-eyed Saturnian subordinate, exclaimed in amazement.

Ru Ghur nodded. "Yes. And I might as well tell you now who he is. He's Captain Future."

"CAPTAIN Future?" yelled Kra Kol.

He and the other raiders instantly raised their weapons. That instinctive action was a tribute to Curt Newton—a tribute to the hate and fear of all such as they for Captain Future.

"So you got away on Leda after all, and came here and joined up with the Futuremen?" Ru Ghur was saying to Curt. "You completely fooled poor old Ru Ghur on Leda, lad. But now your clever Futuremen are buried under tons of rock. Old Ru Ghur is clever too."

Captain Future's gray eyes stabbed the Uranian. "Not so clever but that the Patrol won't find your Outlaw World in time, and destroy you."

Ru Ghur chuckled. "If you only knew how unlikely that is, Future. If you only knew where Outlaw World really is!"

"There's no radium here, Chief," Kral Kol interrupted uneasily. "We ought to finish these two and get back to base before the Patrol gets after us. They may know of this ambush."

Ru Ghur's face stiffened. "We're not going back until we get the radium we came after. Since there's none here, we'll get it elsewhere."

"Chief, it's too dangerous right now!" Kra Kol objected.

Ru Ghur's bland expression did not change, but his voice lashed his subordinates.

"You fools! We only need one more big haul to assure the success of our great plan. Then we'll be able to smash every vestige of opposition to us in the System!"

Captain Future was only half listening. His mind was torn between his apprehension for Joan and his agony over the fate of the Futuremen and Ezra and Bork. It seemed impossible that any of them could still live, buried beneath the masses of shattered rock.

"When are we going to get this last haul of radium?" Kra Kol was asking doubtfully.

"There's one possible source we haven't touched," muttered Ru Ghur. "I've had it in mind a long time, but thought it too risky. But we'll have to take the risk, since we can't get radium elsewhere."

He turned, shot a harsh question at Curt. "Where is Bork King? I know he was here, for that was his ship we shot down."

"If you know he's here, find him," Captain Future said coolly.

"I saw him running into that chasm with the Futuremen," volunteered Kra Kol.

"The devil!" snapped Ru Ghur. "Then he's dead. And he had information that could have helped us." His small eyes rested on Curt Newton's face. "But Future must have that information too. We can get it from him or the girl. Tie them up and carry them into the Falcon. We'll take off."

Curt and Joan, helpless in the face of a dozen guns, were bound and dragged into Ru Ghur's flagship. They were dropped roughly

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into chairs in the Uranian's laboratory-cabin.

Captain Future's heart sank. He had been a prisoner in this room before. In it was the Lethe-ray apparatus with which Ru Ghur had kept him stupefied.

Joan was pale, but she was not thinking of herself.

"Oh, Curt," she moaned "Simon and Otho and the others, entombed under the rock—"

"They're hard to kill, Joan," he murmured encouragement. "Don't give up hope."

"No talking!" rasped Kra Kol, who stood over them, weapon in hand.

The Falcon rose with the three other raider cruisers on roaring jets, heading through the asteroid zone away from Zuun. Ru Ghur waddled into the cabin, puffing from exertion. The fat Uranian dropped into a chair, sighing with relief.

"Now we're comfortable," he said. "And now I want to ask you a few friendly questions, Captain Future." He leaned forward. "Where is the secret Citadel of the Guardians of Mars?"

The question startled Curt. "What makes you think I would know that?" he retorted. "It's the most sacred secret of the Red Planet."

"Yes, yes, I know that." Ru Ghur nodded. "But Bork King was a Guardian of Mars before he was outlawed. He knows all about it. He must have told you in these days you have been working together."

"He told me nothing," Captain Future answered flatly.

A sorrowful look came into the Uranian's yellow face.

"Now, lad, you're not going to lie to old Ru Ghur, are you? He must have told you something."

"Why do you want to know about the Guardians?" Curt asked.

"My reasons wouldn't interest you," Ru Ghur countered smoothly. "What did Bork King tell you?"

"I repeat, he told me nothing," Captain Future answered grimly. "Even if he had, you'd not get it from me."

"I was afraid you'd take that attitude," mourned the Uranian. "That's why I brought Miss Randall along. I believe you'll comply with my simple request rather than let her suffer harm."

"Pay no attention to his threats, Curt," Joan said contemptously. "I'm not afraid."

"Believe me, Miss Randall, I don't want to do anything to you," Ru Ghur said earnestly. "It would nearly kill me if I had to let my men torture a girl like you. But I've a great purpose to carry out, and I'll have to do that if Future won't talk."

In his deadly anxiety for Joan, Curt tried to play for time.

"If I did tell you anything I knew, you'd just kill us afterward," he said.

"No, I wouldn't," Ru Ghur assured. "Of course, I couldn't let you go. I'd keep you both as hostages, under the influence of the Lethe-ray, to make sure that you didn't try any tricks."

"It's not much of a choice—death or that drugged existence," Captain Future said. "Let us think it over."

RU GHUR'S beady eyes narrowed.

"I'll give you twenty minutes, no more." He rose wheezingly to his feet. "Keep your gun on them, Kra Kol," he ordered. "I'm going up to give the pilot our course."

The Saturnian sat down in a chair facing the two prisoners, his heavy atom-pistol pointing toward them. His pale eyes never left them.

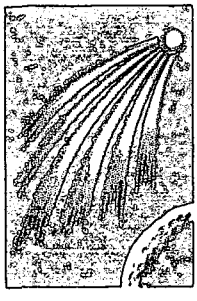
Captain Future felt trapped. Bound at wrists and ankles as he and Joan were, and with that Saturnian guarding them alertly there appeared no possibility of action.

The raider ships were flying through the asteroid zone and Curt estimated that their course now was toward Mars. Why did the Guardian of Mars, the great mystery of the Red Planet, so interest Ru Ghur? There could only be one answer—radium. Somehow, radium must be connected with the Guardians.

"And he said they only need one more haul to carry out their great plan and master a world!" Curt thought with deepening dismay. "What is that plan? What is Ru Ghur going to do to the System?"

CHAPTER XII

The Flare in the Void



GRAG had no sooner dropped onto the ledge with the others, back in the chasm on Zunn, than he raised his great arms to catch Joan when Curt dropped her. But at that moment, the robot heard the thunderous impact of atomic beams and saw Curt whirl back with Joan.

There was a deafening reverberation, and the wall of the chasm split and buckled and leaned omninously out as it was ripped by the energy of the beams.

"The wall's going to collapse!" bellowed Grag. "Get in that niche!"

He had glimpsed a small niche off the ledge. He shoved the others, including Bork King and his Martians, into the precarious protection of the shallow cavity.

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Broken rock was already thundering down. Grag flung himself across the niche, bracing his giant metal body to shield those inside it.

As shattered stone fell upon him, he managed to remain erect, by exerting all his massive strength. Then he felt himself enveloped in thundering darkness. As the reverberations ceased, Grag tried to move. He could not. He was buried by tons of rock debris.

"Simon—Otho!" he called, his voice muffled.

He heard the Brain's muffled reply.

"We're trapped here in the niche. The stone has sealed it."

"It's sealed me up so I can't move even a finger," Grag called. "I'm completely buried in rock."

"You aren't smashed, are you, Grag?" Otho asked anxiously.

"No, I may be a little battered, but it takes more than falling stone to hurt me," the robot answered. "What about Eek and Oog?"

"You would worry about your cursed moon pup even when you're buried alive," muttered Otho. "They're all right. They ducked into the niche with us."

"We've got to get out of here!" Grag said. "The Chief and Joan are still up there!"

The giant robot exerted all his strength to move his arms. It was useless. He could not stir his limbs even an inch.

"I can't move," he finally had to admit to the others.

"Then we're all goners," Ezra Gurney muttered. "The air in this niche won't last long."

"I'll use my atom-pistol to cut a way out!" roared Bork King. "That yellow devil, Ru Ghur, is up there, and I'm going to kill him!"

"Cool down, "the Brain raspingly advised. "Your pistol-beam would only kick back on us if you tried using it in this pocket. Maybe I can get out. I'm the smallest of you all."

They realized then that the Brain, whose boxlike case was all the "body" he had, could get through apertures the rest could not.

"We're going to try picking a little tunnel through the broken rock for Simon," Otho called to Grag. "Stand still, or you'll bring the whole mass down on him."

Grag heard the chip and rattle of rocks, as those trapped inside the niche began to work carefully. After a time the Brain wormed his way into the tiny opening they had made, and used his tractor-beams as hands with which to tug at the debris to open the way more.

An hour passed as the Brain patiently wormed his way through interstices in the mass of shattered rock. Grag waited impatiently, not daring to move lest he imperil Simon's safety.

Finally came the distant, almost inaudible call of the Brain.

"I'm through! Now I can start removing the rock!"

Grag heard the rattle of masses of rock being rolled off. The Brain was working as rapidly as he could, but it seemed a long time before the stone debris was cleared from around the robot's head and shoulders.

"All right, Simon—I'll take over from here," grunted Grag, once he got his arms free.

He made the rock masses fly, hurling the fragments into the chasm. Soon he had the niche unsealed. The others clambered hurriedly out.

"Come on!" called Otho. "Let's see what's happened to the Chief and Joan!"

When they reached the surface, their atom-pistols held ready, dawn was brightening across the rocky face of Zuun. They stared around the shattered rock valley and their hearts sank. The raider ships were gone. So were Captain Future and Joan.

"That double-blasted Uranian has taken the Chief with him, and this time he's got Joan too!" howled Grag.

"Looks like it," muttered old Ezra. "An' this time we've no chance of findin' 'em."

"How the devil did Ru Ghur know that the radium strike here was a fake?" Otho demanded furiously. "His ships just circled once overhead and they seemed to know, and attacked."

"Ru Ghur's uncanny knowledge where radium is concerned is as big a mystery as Outlaw World itself," murmured the Brain thoughtfully.

EZRA GURNEY turned to Bork King and his half-dozen men.

"Bork," he said, "you're outlaws and I maybe ought to arrest you. But Cap'n Future gave his word that you were to go free, so I won't."

For a moment a heavy look came to Bork's face, and his shoulders sagged a little. Then he started on a run across the rock valley.

"I'm going to find the Red Hope," he yelled. "It crashed up there!"

The others hastened after him. They soon reached the spot, where the Martian ship had crashed. One look was enough. The Red Hope's cyclotrons had exploded when it crashed. Nothing was living in that tangle of ripped, scorched metal.

In Bork King's eyes was a look of agony. "Qi Thir and nine other good men, all dead because they followed me on a crazy quest!"

"What quest?" Ezra demanded. "What started you into piratin' after you was outlawed?"

Bork King shook his head somberly. "You

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wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Bork," the Brain said quickly, "We have to pursue Ru Ghur. Are you and your remaining men willing to go along with us, or would you prefer we took you to some place where you can get another ship?"

A flame leaped into the Martian's eyes. "We'll go with you!" he said promptly. We, too, want to catch Ru Guhr!"

"Then come on," said Simon Wright. "We'll get the Comet and start searching the zone for Ru Ghur's ships!"

They raced along the valley to where Grag and Otho had parked the Comet down in the dark chasm. They had started down toward the broad ledge on which the ship rested, when they suddenly stopped short.

"Great space imps, we can't get the ship now! "swore Ezra. "Them cave apes is all over the ledge!"

The fungus grove on this dusky ledge appeared to be a favorite hunting ground of the giant cave apes. A dozen or more of the great white creatures were hunting amid the tall fungi.

"We can't fight our way through them critters to the ship, with only a few atom-pistols!" said Ezra.

"Then Grag will have to go down and get the ship," Otho declared. "He fooled them before into thinking he was a young cave ape. He can do it again."

Grag still wore the coat of white paint, but the robot objected strenuously to the plan.

"I'm not going to play ape again if we never get the ship!"

"Grag," snapped the Brain, "Curtis is in deadly danger."

That overruled the robot's objections.

"Oh, all right," he groaned. "Here, you hold Eek, Otho."

Otho took the moon pup, whose teeth were chattering from terror at sight of the monsters. Then Grag started down to the dusky ledge, shambling like a young ape. But hardly had he reached the edge of the fungus grove, when one of the big apes sighted him and started toward him.

"It's all up with poor old Grag!" muttered Ezra.

"No, wait," Otho said. "Yes, it's just as I thought. It's Grag's 'mama'!"

The giant mother ape who had attempted to adopt Grag on the previous occasion lumbered forward with uncouth bounds of joy, and grabbed Grag, hugging him with all the joy of a mother who has found her long-lost young. Big as he was, the robot was helpless in the huge eighteen-foot creature's grasp. He struggled furiously, and received a resounding slap.

The mother ape seemed a little puzzled by her adopted child's metallic skin. But the great creature evidently decided to ignore this shortcoming, for she sat lovingly snuggling Grag in her arms. Otho and Ezra were shaking with laughter, yet they realized the seriousness of the situation.

"We've got to get him out of that, somehow," said Ezra.

"He's yelling to us!" shouted Bork King.

Grag, clutched in those giant loving arms, was bellowing at the top of his voice:

"Scare her away from me!"

Grag's bellowing had an affect on which he had not calculated. The mother ape, apparently deciding that her adopted child was crying from hunger, dropped him and started purposefully into the fungi.

GRAG scrambled up to run for the ship. Before he got more than a few steps, the giant creature was back and seized him again. She proudly offered him a small cave crab. Grag pretended to eat the thing, then he set up another lusty bellowing, louder than before.

As he had hoped, his "parent" took it as a sign that his hunger continued. Again the great ape put him down and started hunting for another such tasty morsel.

Grag wasted no time in stretching his metal legs through the fungus grove. He reached the Comet, switched off the protective electric charge, tumbled into the ship, and sent it roaring upward with a roar that frightened all the hunting monsters.

When he landed the ship on the surface, and the others hastily entered it, Grag roared: "The first one of you who ribs me about my 'mama' will get his head broken!"

"Why, no one said a word," Otho replied innocently.

He was putting down Eek as he spoke. But Oog, who remained in his arms, suddenly underwent an amazing transformation. Oog was a fat little white animal with chameleon like powers of changing his shape and appearance to imitate other creatures. Suddenly he twisted himself into an exact miniature replica of Grag as he had looked when snuggled into the cave ape's arms. And Oog uttered a loud, whining cry similar to the outcry Grag had made.

"I'll kill that pest if you let him mock me like that!" bellowed Grag.

"Why, Oog means no harm," Otho chuckled. "He just wants to play Grag and mama."

Grag started forward, but Simon Wright intervened with a sharp command.

"Get in that pilot-chair and take the ship off! We've lost enough time as it is."

The Comet roared up across the sunlit, rocky surface of Zuun and tore out through its thin atmosphere into space.

"Ru Ghur's ship can't have got far from here yet," the Brain declared. "See if we can spot them before they get clean away."

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Ezra Gurney and Otho manned the look-out-lenses as Grag skillfully steered the Comet through the meteor swarms and planetoid families. They cruised in a widening spiral around Zuun, since they had no idea of the direction taken by the radium raiders. But as minutes passed without their sighting the four black cruisers, they were oppressed by a realization that they had lost the trail.

They could be a hundred thousand miles from here now, on their way back to Outlaw World," Ezra Gurney said heavily.

"And we still haven't got the faintest idea where Outlaw World is," muttered Grag. "Unless Bork King knows."

The big Martian shook his head. "Not even we Companions of Space know that, and we know the System from Vulcan to Pluto."

"I see something far ahead!" yelled Otho suddenly. "A flare of light at the edge of the meteor-swarm!"

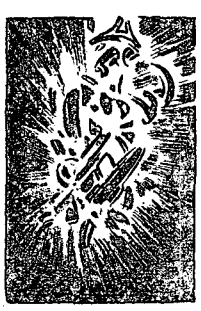
They rushed to the lenses. Far ahead, at the edge of a cloud of sparks they knew to be a big meteor swarm, there had suddenly burgeoned a little flare of intensely brilliant light.

"Maybe one of Ru Ghur's ships collided with a meteor!" cried Bork King.

"Head toward it at top speed, Grag!" exclaimed the Brain.

CHAPTER XIII

In the Meteor Swarm



DESPERATION was in the heart of Captain Future, bound hand and foot and sitting in a chair beside Joan in the cabin of Ru Ghur's flagship. He realized the imminent peril to Joan and himself, for soon the Uranian would return to enforce his ultimatum and Curt could tell him nothing about the citadel of the Guardian of Mars. Then Ru Ghur would use the Lethe-ray on both Joan and himself.

"There must be some way out of this," Curt thought feverishly. "What is it Otho always says—There's never been a knot tied that can't be untied? But how am I going to untie this one?"

Joan gave him a brave smile, which he tried to return. Then his gaze fell upon the tall Lethe-ray apparatus directly beside his chair. Soon the drugging rays of that diabolical machine would plunge him and Joan into an unreal, dream-bound existence.

"By glory!" Curt thought suddenly. "Why the apparatus might help us escape!"

The idea that had shot into his mind seemed fantastically impossible of success. But it might succeed, and that was the only slim hope left.

"If I could point the ray-projector in the right direction and turn it on," Curt thought tensely.

He looked at Kra Kol. The watchful Saturnian's chair was only four feet in front of him.

Captain Future stretched painfully, as though cramped by his bonds. He started to rise clumsily, his head bumping against the swiveled projector of the Lethe-ray apparatus. "Sit down!" ordered Kra Kol.

"I was only stretching," Curt complained. "I'm getting numb."

"You'll be number when Ru Ghur gets back," threatened the Saturnian. "If I had my way, you'd be dead now."

Curt glanced up surreptitiously. His apparently accidental bump against the projector had accomplished what he sought. Its quartz lens was now pointing straight at Kra Kol's head, and the intensity control was at nearly full strength. Apparently Ru Ghur had been using the machine for some nefarious purpose since Curt's escape.

The switch of the Lethe-ray was near his shoulder. He leaned in his chair slightly, pressing his shoulder against the switch, and coughed loudly to cover the instant humming.

Kra Kol looked more and more suspicious at this sudden coughing fit following Captain Future's attempt to rise.

"What's the matter with you now?" he demanded harshly.

"These bonds are so tight they're making me sick," choked Curt, and kept the coughing spasms going.

The invisible force of the Lethe-ray was streaming from the projector and bathing Kra Kol's head!

The Saturnian looked queer, in a moment. He opened his mouth as though to shout, tried to rise and could not. He slumped against the back of his chair, rendered unconscious by the malign power of the dream-carrying rays.

"Curt, what is it?" exclaimed Joan, astonished: "What's happened to him?"

Captain Future quickly explained. Joan looked first hopeful, then dismayed.

"But what good does it do us? We're still bound hand and foot."

"You can get up and shuffle toward me if you're careful," Curt told her. "If I can use my teeth on those cords, we'll be out of here soon."

Joan rose to her feet precariously, and unsteadily made hopping movements that finally brought her to the chair in which Curt sat.

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He hastily chewed at the bonds around her hands. In a few moments, Joan had her hands free.

She as hastily unbound her ankles, then set Captain Future free of his hands.

"Kra Kol is waking up!" she exclaimed.

The Saturnian had fallen back out of the radius of the Lethe-ray when he had slumped back in his chair. Now he was beginning to stir. Curt grabbed the atom-pistol from his limp hand and brought the butt down on the Saturnian's head. Kra Kol lapsed into unconsciousness again.

Curt turned off the Lethe-ray machine and wheeled toward the door, the atom-pistol in his hand.

"Joan," he said swiftly, "our only chance is to get off this ship in space-suits and use impellers to reach a habitable planetoid. But half the crew would see us before we reached the main-space door amidships." He pointed to one of the port-hole windows. "We can get out that way. But first I'll have to get space-suits and impellers. They're in a locker off the corridor forward of here. I know where—I was a prisoner on this ship before."

HE OPENED the door softly and looked along the corridor. There was no one in it. Ru Ghur must be with his officers in the pilot-room.

"Wait, Joan," he whispered. "I'll be back with the suits in a minute."

He slipped forward along the corridor, reached the locker, and hauled out two space-suits and four of the small hand-rockets called impellers—two for each of them. Then he heard voices in the pilot-room just forward.

"—swing in around Mars and come down its' shadow," Ru Ghur was saying.

"How will we know where the place is, if Future doesn't give in and tell you?" demanded another voice.

"We can still use the radium compass, can't we?" retorted Ru Ghur. "There isn't a chance we can miss."

Captain Future's mind was illumined as by a lightning flash from the few words he had just overheard.

"Radium compass?" he muttered. "That's the answer to part of the whole mystery! Why didn't I guess it?"

There was no time for speculation. He raced back to the cabin where Joan was standing guard over the unconscious Kra Kol.

"Joan, I've finally got a clue that may lead us to Ru Ghur's base, if we get a chance to work on it!" he said. "But on with the suits, now!"

They rapidly donned the space-suits. Curt was starting toward the port-hole window when Joan spoke hurriedly through the short-range telaudio inside each suit.

"Curt, wait!" she exclaimed. "What about Kra Kol?"

He knew what she meant. The unconscious Saturnian would die if he remained in this cabin when the window was shattered.

"I suppose we can't kill him in cold blood," muttered Captain Future. "Though I'll bet Otho would call me a big ninny for doing this."

He tossed Kra Kol's limp form out into the corridor, and closed the door. Then he fired his atom-pistol at the window.

The crackling blast of atomic energy ripped the tough glassite window into fragments. With a loud *whoosh* the air in the cabin rushed out into space. There was a sharp click from the door as it was locked, automatically functioning to seal off the rest of the ship.

"Out of the window!" Curt Newton exclaimed. "I'll get outside and help you through, we'll have to leap clear at once."

He scrambled through the port-hole and hung to its edges outside. The girl quickly followed, and for a moment the two clung precariously to the smooth metal side of the Falcon as the ship rushed through space, their impellers thrust in their belts.

All around them stretched the abyss of space, black, unplumbed, stirred by the shining sparks of the meteor swarms and planetoids. The ship was throbbing through the void, its tail-rockets flaring. The other three raider ships were on the other side, out of sight.

Captain Future gripped the girl's arm. "Leap, Joan! We've got to clear the rocket-flare, remember!"

They braced their heels against the side of the ship and sprang out like swimmers diving into space. They shot away from the rushing ship, turning over and over. So tremendous was the speed of the Falcon and its companion ships that in the next moment all four were out of sight.

"So far, so good," encouraged Curt Newton. "But they'll soon discover our escape and come searching for us."

They were near the edge of one of the big meteor swarms the squadron had been skirting.

"We'll make for that swarm and hide," he said tensely. "The ship won't dare to enter that."

He unhooked the impellers from his belt. Holding the hand-rockets, he eased open their catches. They spat flame, kicking him toward the swarm.

Joan was using her own impellers in the same fashion. Side by side, they floated toward the hive of meteors.

"Curt, look!" she called suddenly and with

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sharp urgency.

She was pointing in the direction the raider ships had gone. He glimpsed a tiny, distant jet of rocket flame.

"Ru Ghur's ships are firing their lateral rockets—turning around!" he exclaimed. "They've missed us already."

Tension grew by the minute as they floated with agonizing slowness toward the meteor swarm. The raider ships would soon be back, and the little impellers could not thrust them faster.

"We're not going to make it, are we?" Joan asked steadily.

"It'll be close," Curt gritted.

SUDDENLY Joan did an astounding thing. She snatched his impellers from Curt's hand and dropped them and, with a blast of her own impellers darted away from him.

"Joan!" he cried. "You're heading back toward the raider ships!"

Her voice had a catch in it when she answered. "Curt, you must get away, at any cost, now that you have a clue to the raiders. I don't matter!"

Captain Future's horror made his voice a strangled shout. Joan was going to let herself be found by the returning ships, knowing that the time they spent in picking her up woud give Curt minutes enough to reach the concealment of the meteor swarm.

"I won't let you do it," he cried hoarsely. "Come back here! I order you to!"

"It would only mean that both of us would be captured," came her answer. "That would destroy your chance of crushing Ru Ghur."

She was already almost out of sight, as she use the impeller vigorously to thrust her toward the returning cruisers. And Curt Newton was unable to follow her! He was floating toward the meteor swarm, and without an impeller could not change his direction.

Frantically he begged, but now without reply. Joan was already out of reach of his space-suit telaudio.

"Joan—Joan!" he called fruitlessly, again and again.

Then, straining his eyes for sight of her, he glimpsed spurts of rocket fire from the raider ships. They had sighted her floating in space, were halting to pick her up.

Captain Future himself was now floating into the meteor swarm! Totally helpless to steer himself, he found himself entering a region thronged with rushing, spinning masses of jagged stone.

A ponderous ovoid meteor as large as a space-ship rushed toward him like a monster juggernaut of the void. It swung through space only a dozen yards from him, and mutual gravitational attraction sucked him gently toward it so that he circled it like a human satellite.

But the circles of his orbit around the meteor were rapidly diminishing as he was drawn to its surface. He hit the jagged rock surface with a gentle jar. Instantly he was on his feet.

"Here I am, blast your black souls!" he raged. "Come on and get me!"

Curt Newton, in his rage at Joan's recapture, would have welcomed it himself at that moment.

But the four raider cruisers that had picked up the girl were now coasting slowly along the edge of the meteor swarm at a respectful distance.

"They know I'm in here, but they don't dare come after me," Curt gritted.

Captain Future knew that keen eyes and powerful telescopes were peering into the swarm. But they would not be able to make out his dark, space-suited figure on this spinning meteor. And his telaudio could not reach them.

The cruisers could not enter the swarm. Nor would Ru Ghur dare to delay long enough to send men in space-suits to search the whole hives of meteors, since the radium raiders were already fearful that the Planet Patrol was racing to this sector.

"So that's it!" Curt muttered in a moment. "He's going to make sure of me."

Ru Ghur's cruisers had come around to present their sides to the swarm. From their batteries of heavy atom-guns, a barrage of atomic beams began to play upon the meteors. One by one, each was seared by the blinding rays. The four cruisers advanced slowly, their fire coming nearer and nearer to the meteor on which Captain Future stood.

Despite his overmastering rage, Curt Newton realized that to submit unresistingly to being killed would not help Joan. He spotted a cavity in the jagged surface, and dived into it a moment before the beams hit his little world.

Blinding atomic force crackled, searing and splitting the rock, touching veins of magnesium ore to flame. Then the beams swept on.

Curt scrambled out. Ru Ghur's cruisers were systematically raking the meteors. Finally they ceased firing and sped off into space.

Captain Future watched them vanish, his heart sick.

"Heaven help Ru Ghur if he harms Joan!" he muttered hoarsely.

He tried desperately to take a more hopeful view of the girl's danger. Ru Ghur had not seemed to think that Joan could know anything of Bork King's Martian secrets. That made her peril a little less.

Yet he realized blackly that although the Uranian might not immediately harm her, he would consider her a hostage, and also, as

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an agent of the Patrols, a source of information about their plans.

"I'll smash him if I have to track him to the farthest galaxy in the universe!" Curt swore. "And I can do it now, if I can just get out of here."

That brought him back to his immediate predicament. He was hopelessly marooned on this meteor. Without an impeller, he could not leave it. And the Futuremen were entombed on Zunn!

When he had escaped with Joan, he had planned to use the charges of the two impellers to make a signal of atomic fire that would be seen by any ship in this part of space. But that was impossible now. An inexorable time limit pressed upon him also. The oxygen in the tank of his space-suit would last only so many hours. Then he must inevitably perish.

CHAPTER XIV

Secret of Mars

NEWTON refused to surrender to despair, however. His overmastering anxiety for the girl he loved strengthened his fierce resolution to find some way out. But there was only one possibility of escape, and that was to send out a distress signal that would bring some ship to his rescue. A telaudio signal was out of the question. It must be a flash signal.

Captain Future suddenly remembered the way the magnesium veins in the rock surface of the meteor had flashed into flame when struck by the atom beams. Considerable metallic magnesium was in meteors. If he could collect enough of it, he could make a brilliant beacon.

At once, he started hunting for the metal. It looked hopeless at first. All the surface veins of the element had been burned out when the atom beams had blasted across the meteor. And he couldn't dig beneath the surface, without tools.

There remained the other side of the meteor. It had not been strafed by Ru Ghur's cruisers. Captain Future trudged around the blackened surface of the meteor to the other side. The atomic gravitation equalizer at his belt made him able to walk normally even on this small celestial body, for it maintained a fixed artificial gravity field.

He reached the unblasted side of the meteor and hopefully searched that jagged rock expanse.

"Not much surface magnesium," he muttered. "But maybe enough, if I have time to get it out." Time was the vital factor—every minute lessened the supply of oxygen in his tank.

He began to dig out scraps of magnesium with the butt end of his atom-pistol. But he could not follow any vein more than a few inches deep, so his little pile of magnesium grew but slowly.

He had no time to notice the weirdness of his surroundings. And weird indeed was the dark surface of the spinning meteor, beneath a sky blazing with rushing lights like stars.

Captain Future finally realized that no more than a few hours' oxygen was left him.

"Got to try it now or never!" he thought.

The heap of magnesium he had so painfully accumulated was not half as large as he had desired. Still there was a good chance that its flare might be seen. For although the space lanes did not run through this dangerous zone, they ran not far above and below it.

Curt Newton retreated to a safe distance from his pile of magnesium. Then he aimed his atomic-pistol at the metal and pulled the trigger.

A blinding white brilliance lit up the whole surface of the asteroid as his atom beam touched off the magnesium. He had mixed mineral oxides with the metal to furnish sufficient oxygen for the flare, and the resultant flash was so terrific it blinded him even through closed eyelids.

When he ventured to open his eyes a minute later, the flare had died out.

"Now all I've got to do is wait and hope it was seen," he thought grimly.

He settled himself for the wait that would mean life or death. He had already reduced the flow of oxygen from his tank to a minimum.

To Captain Future's amazement, less than ten minutes had passed when he glimpsed the rocket flash of an approaching ship. More astounding still, this ship was coming boldly into the meteor swarm.

"It can't be!" he told himself feverishly. "But nobody else would dare enter a swarm . . . by space, it is!"

He had recognized the Comet. Jubilantly he realized that the Futuremen had somehow escaped death.

The little ship landed and Captain Future tumbled inside it. The Futuremen, Ezra Gurney, and Bork King were assailing him with excited questions.

"Chief, we thought Ru Ghur had you and Joan!" Otho was babbling. "We were searching for him."

He still has Joan!" Curt said tightly. "We've got to overtake him. Head for Mars, Grag!"

"For Mars?" cried Bork King. "Do you

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mean that Ru Ghur's raiders are going there?"

"Yes, Bork! They're after one more haul of radium—the last they need for the Uranian's mysterious project. He tried to extort information from me about the Guardians of Mars. He thought you might have told me where their Citadel is."

The massive face of the towering Martian became livid.

"The Citadel of the Guardians? Gods of Mars, then Ru Ghur is planning to rob my planet of the vital radium hoard on which its life depends!"

THEY were all startled by the strong emotion of Bork King and the other Martians. They all seemed stunned by horror.

"Bork, what do you mean?" Captain Future cried. "I'm not rying to pry into the secrets of your planet. But this concerns the whole System! Is there really radium where Ru Ghur is going?"

Bork King nodded. "Yes—the pitiful dwindling hoard with which Mars keeps its people alive. And that cursed Uranian wants to rob us of it and doom our planet!" He went on hoarsely, "You know that all that keeps Mars alive is the ancient canal system which brings the waters of its melting snow caps down from its poles. And you have probably wondered just how the flow was maintained and regulated in the vast canal network. That is the greatest secret of Mars! One our people have concealed for safety's sake. But now that Ru Ghur has penetrated it, I can tell you. Near the northern pole of Mars is a great hidden underground pumping station. Its giant pumps, operated by ,super atomic power from radium fuel, keep the water of the melting snow caps flowing through the canals—the life-brood of Mars!"

Bork King drew a deep breath. "Only ten men are ever entrusted at one time with the secret of the pump station's location. They are responsible for the operation of the pumps, and for the maintenance of a reserve of radium fuel. They are called the Guardians of Mars, and until several months ago, I was one of them.

"But months ago, it became impossible for us to secure radium. The depredations of Ru Ghur's raiders had almost cut off the supply from the outer planets. What little came through was allocated to important power projects on other worlds, and we could not secure it at any price. In desperation, I resolved to turn pirate to get the radium Mars must have. For the sake of secrecy, I had myself disgraced and outlawed. That served as a cover for the pirate activities in which I and a score of faithful followers engaged."

"I knew you were no traitor, Bork!" exclaimed Curt Newton. "You were trying to take radium forcibly from interplanetary ships before Ru Ghur's raiders got it?"

Bork King nodded. "But on Leda Ru Ghur robbed us of all we had. He must have guessed what I was doing, and so, ferreted out the secret of the Guardians. But he doesn't know the location of the pump station!"

Captain Future's heart sank. "Bork," he said slowly, "Ru Ghur can find the station!"

The towering Martian stiffened. "Impossible! He could search Mars for years without ever stumbling upon it!

Curt shook his head. "He has an instrument which he'll use to locate your Citadel —a radium compass."

The Brain uttered a sharp exclamation. "Of course! We should have guessed it!"

"What are you talking about?" cried Bork King.

"Electroscopic instruments will detect the presence of radium at short distances," Captain Future explained swiftly. "Prospectors use them in searching for deposits. Ru Ghur must have perfected such an instrument that will work at long range, probably at tremendous distances."

"So that's how he's always been able to trace radium shipments with such uncanny accuracy!" exclaimed Otho.

"An' that's why the yellow devil knew there wasn't no radium on Zuun—that it was a trap!" added Ezra.

"You mean, he'll use his compass to locate the exact position of the underground station?" demanded Bork King. "Then raid it?" The big Martian's craggy face grew dark with an overmastering passion. "If he dares to violate the Citadel—"

Curt tried to calm him and the other excited Martians.

"There's a chance we can reach Mars before he strikes!" he said. "He's got a big start on us, but the Comet is fast."

The Comet was already out of the asteroid zone and was building up to almost unbearable velocities as it streaked toward the tiny red disk of Mars. Grag had thrown in as much of the auxiliary vibration drive as they dared use between planets. To attain higher speed would be to defeat their own object, since longer time would be required for deceleration. But Captain Future knew that with the start Ru Ghur had, the radium raiders must be almost to the Red Planet.

Ezra Gurney had been shrilling excitedly into the telaudio, on the Planet Patrol frequency. But he soon reported defeat.

"I was hopin' there might be a Patrol squadron near Mars that could head off Ru Ghur. But they're all out beyond Jupiter, searchin' for the raiders!"

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"Can't you get a telaudio warning through to the pump station to warn them there of possible attack?" Captain Future asked Bork King.

BORK shook his head, his face haggard. "The Citadel of the Guardians has no means of communication with the outside world. That has been to insure its concealment."

"We may make it in time, anyway," Curt said tautly.

The Comet screamed through interplanetary space at a velocity that would have been suicidal for any other ship. Fear went with it—the fear of Bork King and his Martians for the radium that was the life of their world, Captain Future's agonized fear for Joan, and the grim fear of all of them because of what Ru Ghur's sinister schemes might do to the System if his raiders secured this final haul.

Curt had taken over the controls of the ship. But his desperate thoughts outran even the racing ship as he sat, hands clenched on the space-stick, his red hair disordered, his lean brown face taut with anxiety.

Gradually the little red disk of Mars grew into a shadowed crimson sphere hanging in starry space. Plain upon it were the great canals that gave it life.

"The Citadel of the Guardians is ten degrees south of the northern pole, and twenty degrees east of the meridian," Bork said hoarsely.

"We'll be there in thirty minutes," Captain Future answered tersely. "Tell Otho and Grag to man our guns. And Bork, if there's fighting, remember that Joan is in Ru Ghur's flagship."

The Comet rushed toward the white snow cap at Mars' northern pole like a shooting star. Its brake rockets roaring flame, it scudded low across the glittering white snow.

The two moons were rising over Mars. Against their light, a low black mountain like a squat pinnacle of black rock stood out.

"The Citadel of the Guardians is inside that pinnacle!" exclaimed Bork King. "There's a secret door."

But as the Comet swept down to land the big Martian uttered a hoarse cry.

"The door has been blasted!" They've been here and are gone!"

"They may not be gone yet, though I don't see their ships!" Captain Future cried, with fast-waning hope. "Come on! And bring your atom-guns!"

They all burst out of the little ship, headed toward the pinnacle at a run. The big door at the base of the mountain that had been cunningly masked to look like the solid rock now yawned like a gaping mouth.

Inside it, a tunnel lit by uranite bulbs led slantingly down into the mountain. Bork King pitched down the steep passage with his atom-gun held hip-high, his face black with rage.

Captain Future and the others, following him, emerged suddenly into a vast underground chamber that had been hollowed from the solid rock. A low throbbing sound came from gigantic atomic-powered pumps that towered up into the shadows.

The beating heart of Mars, this hidden station whose great pumps kept the waters of its canals constantly flowing!

"God o' space!" shouted old Ezra, aghast. "Ru Ghur's been here, all right."

Half a score of dead Martians lay about the underground chamber—Guardians of Mars who had died fighting. And the corpses of motley raiders showed that the Guardians had taken toll of Ru Ghur's men.

"The radium!" cried the Brain. "Did they get it?"

Bork King was already running frantically to a door in the wall. He tore it open, disclosing a small room hollowed from the rock.

The room was empty.

"The radium is gone," he said thickly. "The pitiful reserve of fuel that alone could keep these pumps operating." His stricken eyes turned dazedly toward the huge machines. "In a few hours, they'll stop. The water will cease to flow in the canals all

[*Turn page*]

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. *(Adv.)*

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over Mars. And Mars will slowly wither and die."

It was a horrible thought, but it was true. The fuel that could keep these pumps going was the one vital spot on the planet and with cunning and shrewdness that spot had been struck. And Ru Ghur had his supply of radium.

Terrible realization of the full scope of the disaster came to them all as they stood looking at each other in this chamber of death.

"Ru Ghur's last raid—and it succeeded!" muttered Otho. "He's on his way back to his cursed Outlaw World with the last radium he needed for whatever devil's scheme he's got in mind."

"And we can't follow, not knowing where Outlaw World is!" groaned Grag.

But in this terrible moment Curt Newton was not thinking of the stolen radium that meant death for Mars and victory for Ru Ghur and his sinister, plans.

"Joan!" his tortured mind was crying. "She sacrificed herself for me, and I've failed her!"

DEFEAT, utter and final, stared him in the face. But in his blackness of despair, Captain Future glimpsed one last ray of hope.

He told them what it was in a voice that was cool and poised. This was a situation that called for calm, realistic thinking, as well as the utmost in ingenuity and improvisation—if Ru Ghur and his fiendish plans were to be effectively countered and smashed.

"There's still a slim chance left," he told the others. "One possible way to locate Outlaw World. Ru Ghur's radium compass! If he could construct one, we can."

"How long would that take?" cried Bork King. "And even if you devised such a thing, how long would it take for us to find Outlaw World with it? While all the time, Mars is dying!"

Captain Future swung around. And on his drawn face was agony even the Futuremen had hardlly ever seen there before.

"Do you think I don't know how much time we'll be losing?" he cried, his voice raw with emotion. "Do you think it means nothing to me that Joan has been carried away to some unimaginable place? I want to follow now as badly as you. But this is the only way we can follow."

"I'm sorry, Jan," Bork King muttered, unconsciously reverting to the old name. "I guess you have as big a stake in this as I have."

"We all have a stake in crushing Ru Ghur," the Brain said ominously. "That Uranian's mysterious schemes mean danger to the System."

CHAPTER XV.

Into Fiery Peril

EZRA GURNEY broke the taut silence to ask Captain Future a question.

"I ain't no scientist," he said, "but can you build any compass that'll detect radium at interplanetary distances?"

Curt Newton explained rapidly. "Radium emits three different emanations, the Alpha, Beta and Gamma rays. The Alpha and Beta rays, streams of sub-atomic particles, powerfully affect an electroscope. That's why electroscopes are used by radium prospectors for surveys. But those two rays are of no use to us, for they have low penetrating power and wouldn't affect even the most sensitive instrument at great distances.

"The Gamma rays, on the other hand, consist of etheric impulses just like light-rays. They travel at the same speed as light and have tremendous penetrating power. If we can construct a sufficiently sensitive electroscopic instrument, it will register the presence of Gamma rays from large masses of radium, even millions of miles away."

"Don't underestimate the difficulties," warned the Brain. "Ru Ghur had more time than we have. And he has always been an expert on radiation. In his experiments in that field he discovered the Lethe-ray."

"We've got to go to the Moon laboratory," Curt said urgently. "The facilities of the Comet aren't elaborate enough for the job."

"I'm going with you!" flamed Bork King. "Whether you want me or not, I'm going to help find Outlaw World and kill Ru Ghur!"

Captain Future gripped his arm understandingly. "Bork, you're with us on this until the end."

Bork King delayed only long enough to instruct his Martians followers to notify the authorities of the Red Planet of the disaster. Then he hastened after Curt.

In moments after they had emerged from the black mountain, and ran across the snow to the Comet the little ship roared up into the sky.

Curt Newton drove the craft at reckless speed toward Earth's Moon. He grudged every minute of the time it took, his anxiety had become so feverishly intense.

But when they had landed in the underground hangar in Tycho crater and entered the big Moon laboratory he forced all agonized speculation from his mind. Deliberately he became the cool scientist.

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Captain Future's mastery of science was matched only by that of his teacher, the Brain. These two greatest scientists of the Solar System now applied themselves to their baffling problem with a calm detachment that none of the others could share.

The tall, red-haired planeteer and the box-like Brain, hovering over sheets of formulae and talking in technical terms, made a spectacle at which big Bork King stared almost in awe.

"There's something a little unhuman about his self-control," he muttered to Ezra Gurney.

Old Ezra nodded, his faded eyes thoughtful. "Cap'n Future is the most human chap in the System, really. But he was raised on this Moon by the Futuremen, an' never saw other people till he was nearly a man. It shows in him sometimes, when he's under strain like this."

The perspiration glistening on Curt's Newton's drawn, lean face showed the stress under which he labored to keep that cool detachment.

"Obviously, the heart of a long-distance radium compass must be an electroscope super-sensitive to Gamma rays," he was saying to Simon. "But even the most sensitive electroscope we could build would not detect radium more than a few million miles away, the rays would be so dispersed."

"Then we must utilize a focusing device to gather the rays for the electroscope, just as a telescope lens gathers light rays for the eye," pointed out the Brain.

"Chief, maybe you could focus Gamma rays by using the principle of the electron microscope?" interrupted Grag, hopefully.

"Grag, the super-scientist!" Otho said witheringly. "Gamma rays aren't affected by electric or magnetic fields, you bucket-head."

"It will have to be a lens to focus Gamma rays," said Captain Future rapidly.

"And of synthetic crystal whose sub-atomic structure is designed to refract the rays," muttered Simon Wright. "It can be done, but it won't be a short or easy task."

"It's got to be done quickly!" rapped Curt. "Otho can construct a super-sensitive electroscope, and Grag can build the mounting. You and I will concentrate on the lens."

There followed in the Moon laboratory a period of toil that was a supreme example of the scientific genius and cooperation of the Futuremen. Few words passed between them in these hours.

The big Martian and the old Patrol marshal, unable to help, finally retired to an adjoining room and slept exhaustedly.

BORK KING awoke six hours later. He sprang up and hurried back into the laboratory. Ezra was already there. Grag and Otho had finished their share of the task and were intently watching Curt and Simon, who were inspecting a glittering, two-foot lens of transparent crystal.

Captail Future glanced at the Martian. "We've cast the lens," he said, "and it seems all right. We'll soon know."

"Here's the mounting, Chief," Grag said, dragging it forward.

It was a short, massive tube of heavy lead, mounted on a swivel. The synthetic lens was carefully fitted into the end of this tube. Into the other end was fitted the super-sensitive electroscope Otho had constructed. They carried the apparatus to the Comet and bolted it outside the hull of the ship, near the prow. Electric connections led through the hull to the pilot-room.

"It's like a telescope mounted outside the ship—one that 'sees' by Gamma rays instead of light," Curt explained. "If there's a large mass of radium somewhere even at a tremendous distance, its Gamma rays will be focused by the lens and will register on the electroscope."

He pointed to a large pointer-and-dial on the instrument panel, and a calibrated meter to which Otho was attaching the electric connections from the apparatus outside the hull.

"The pointer on that dial shows at what part of space the 'telescope' is pointed. The meter registers the intensity of the Gamma rays from that quarter, if any."

Ezra's eyes lit up. "So this thing will show just where Outlaw World is!"

"I'm hoping it will," Captain Future said. "We're ready to try it now. We'll take the Comet out into space to avoid any possible distortion."

The little ship rose out of Tycho crater and swiftly moved a few hundred thousand miles above the twin worlds of Earth and Moon.

"We'll quarter the northern hemisphere of outer space first," muttered Curt.

He slowly moved the pointer on the dial. The telescopic device outside the hull swept its eye over the vast void outside the Solar System. Crowded over the intensity-meter, they waited for its needle to bob and betray the presence of radium masses in some unsuspected quarter. But the needle did not quiver once, as the systematic search continued.

"Looks like Outlaw World ain't out in that direction," murmured Ezra.

Captain Future shifted the Comet a little below the plane of the ecliptic and they made a similar systematic sweep of the remainder of outer space. Astoundingly, this search was as fruitless as the first!

"The needle never moved!" cried Otho. "Then the radium raiders' base isn't in outer

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space after all."

"It must be!" exclaimed Bork incredulously. "Maybe it's so far away that even your instrument can't detect the stolen radium."

Curt Newton shook his head decisively. "Outlaw World can't be that far. If it were, Ru Ghur's raiders would not be able to go and come from it as quickly as they do."

"But if it were in another dimension—" the big Martian began.

"I discounted that long ago," Curt told him. "I saw the interior of Ru Ghur's flagship, remember. It had no dimension shifting apparatus in it, and I doubt if the Uranian knows that secret."

"But if Outlaw World isn't in outer space, where is it?" Grag demanded.

"Outlaw World is inside the Solar System!" Captain Future said tightly.

"It can't be!" Bork King burst in vehemently. "The Patrol searched every world, every moon, every asteroid!"

"They didn't search the System with a radium compass," Curt reminded, then explained rapidly. "The radium deposits of the System's worlds have been thoroughly plotted by electroscopic surface surveys. We'll allow for those natural deposits. And if any planet or moon shows more radium present than the Government surveys indicate, we'll know Ru Ghur's stolen radium is there."

Using the survey statistics from the microfilm library of the Comet, Curt and Simon computed the corrections of each planet and moon and asteroid for natural radium deposits.

"If Outlaw World is inside the System, then it must be an invisible world!" Bork King declared, still unconvinced.

Captain Future and the Brain finally finished their calculations.

"We'll take Pluto and its moons, first," Captain Future said.

They pointed the "telescope" of the radium-compass at distant Pluto. The needle of the intensity meter jumped across the dial, as it registered the Gamma rays from radium on the outermost planet. There was no unaccounted-for radium on Pluto.

Curt carried out similar observations on Pluto's moons, one by one. On them, the instrument revealed no unsuspected radium. He shifted the telescopic tube to bear on Neptune, the next planet inward.

AN HOUR passed and another, in this slow, laborious search. Neither Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter, nor any of their moons showed an excess of radium. Nor did a search of the asteroid zone have any more result.

Bork King grew more skeptical, as Mars, Earth, the Moon showed nothing. Curt Newton felt his hopes sink as an observation of Venus proved fruitless. Mercury remained their last hope. And Mercury also showed no excess of radium!

Captain Future could hardly believe his eyes.

"We must have made some mistake!" he declared, stunned. "Outlaw World must be inside the System!"

"It can't be, by this evidence," denied the Brain. "We've turned the radium compass on every world in the System."

"No!" Captain Future interrupted suddenly. "There's one we overlooked—Vulcan."

"Why, that solar satellite is about as likely as the Sun itself," Ezra said incredulously.

His objection was understandable. Vulcan, the little world that circled the Sun just outside the burning corona, was never reckoned as one of the System's worlds. For it lay in such terrific solar heat that no one had yet been able to visit it.

The Futuremen had not been able to reach it, and they had tried. Even the Comet, with its powerful anti-heater equipment, had been forced to retreat. But Curt Newton clung to this last spark of hope.

"I'm going to take an observation on Vulcan anyway," he insisted. "There are not supposed to be any radioactive elements on it at all, are there?"

"No, Vulcan's specific gravity is too low for any of the heavier elements," said Simon. "But this is a waste of time."

Curt stubbornly swung the lens tube of the radium compass to point at the satellite that was hidden by the glare of the Sun.

Instantly, the needle of the intensity-meter jumped sharply across the dial!

"Why it shows a big mass of radium on Vulcan, and that can't be right," Otho declared. "Something's gone wrong with the meter."

Captain Future's eyes were suddenly brilliant. "No, the meter's all right. We've finally found it. Vulcan is Outlaw World!"

Ezra Gurney burst into vehement denial.

"You must be space struck! Vulcan's too hot for life. How could Ru Ghur have a base there?"

Curt shook his head. "I can't understand it myself. But the radium compass shows that he does. That's his hoard of stolen radium that the compass spotted!" He snapped his fingers "And I remember now! His ship had anti-heater equipment! I thought nothing of it, for lots of ships have anti-heaters so that they can take short-cuts close to the Sun."

"But Chief, all our calculations proved that Vulcan is so hot it must be molten!" objected Grag.

"Our calculations must have been wrong," Captain Future insisted. "Vulcan can't be molten, or Ru Ghur's raiders couldn't have

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their base there."

"Can we reach that world in this ship of yours?" Bork King demanded.

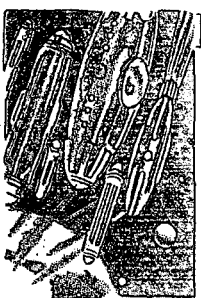
"We can, by running the Comet's anti-heaters at full capacity," Curt answered. "But that will use up all our copper cyc fuel by the time we get there. We'd have to find copper for fuel on Vulcan, or the cycs would stop and we'd perish there. We turned back in our previous attempt to reach the solar satellite because we were sure Vulcan was molten. But now I'm going to gamble on my belief that it is not." He looked from face to face. "But none of you need take this risk."

"I'd follow Ru Ghur into the Sun itself to kill that devil and get Mars' radium back!" blazed Bork King.

"An' the rest of us feel the same way," drawled Ezra. "You ain't the only one that's worryin' about Joan, Curt."

CHAPTER XVI

Outlaw World



RETURNING with the Comet to the Moon laboratory, hastily, the adventurers packed every available inch of the ship with powdered copper fuel for its cyclotrons. Then, with Captain Future at the spacestick, the little ship rose from the Moon and plunged toward the glaring Sun on its daring journey.

Grag and Otho checked the anti-heaters carefully. Those big mechanisms in the cyc room would alone enable them to penetrate the solar heat, by emitting a constant counter wave to dampen the vibrations of the Sun's radiant heat.

Finally, the ship rushed across the orbit of Mercury. It seemed to poise for the final plunge into peril.

"There it is, close to the Sun!" Captain Future called. "You can just see it in the lens."

Dark-ray filters had been slipped over the lookout lenses. Even with this protection, the vista that confronted them was terrifying. The Sun loomed up in colossal majesty, the blinding orb appearing to fill half the firmament, with its burning corona extending far out from it.

Close to the outer edge of that corona hung a dark body that was but a speck beside the mighty star—Vulcan.

"Don't start the anti-heaters yet," Curt called. "We can stand this, and we'll need every ounce of fuel."

It was already uncomfortably hot, even in this insulated ship. And the temperature was mounting as they roared on into increasing heat.

Curt had slipped on ray-proof sun glasses, but even so the glare of the great star dazed his eyes. He was sweating in the stifling heat, and old Ezra was gasping for breath. Little Eek clawed at Grag's foot, while Oog was whimpering in complaint.

"The hull won't take much more heat than this!" warned Otho.

"Throw in the anti-heaters now," ordered Captain Future.

He opened the cyclotrons to the last notch. But now most of their power was diverted to the anti-heaters which threw a protective aura around the Comet. The heat in it abated a little.

Curt looked anxiously at the fuel gauges. The cycs, at full power, were eating up the fuel at a rapid rate. They would have about enough to reach Vulcan, and little more.

"Which means we get copper at Vulcan, or else," he thought grimly.

"Gods of Mars!" gasped Bork King. "Look at the Sun now!"

The whole heavens ahead were Sun, to their dazed eyes. Minds reeled as they flung on toward the Titan orb and its satellite.

The fiery radiance of the great star penetrated even through the protective aura of the anti-heaters. The air inside the ship was suffocatingly hot. Blood was pounding in Curt's temples, from the heat. He heard the deafening roar of the cycs and hum of the anti-heaters only dimly.

"We're nearly there!" he called back finally. "It won't get any worse than this. We'll land and replenish our copper fuel, then—"

"Replenish our fuel on Vulcan?" cried Grag. "Chief, we can't! Look down there, through the lookout lens!"

Captain Future looked down at the solar satellite toward which they were descending. And he felt the blood leave his heart. Vulcan was a molten ball! Its surface was an unbroken expanse of fiery liquid rock, on which danced changing flames.

It would be impossible to get copper here. And in less than an hour, their fuel would give out, the cyclotrons and anti-heaters would fail and let them perish in the flaming heat!

* * * * *

Joan Randall awoke slowly, her head throbbing with pain. She tried to raise a hand to her forehead, and could not. Her arms and legs were bound once more, and she was fastened to a chair. And even as she opened her eyes the crashing roar of heavy atom-guns struck her ears.

She was in a small cabin in a space-ship of

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considerable size, and remembered then that she was once more a prisoner in Ru Ghur's Falcon. Opposite her stood a wizened, rat-faced Mercurian with a heavy atom-pistol in his hand. He showed rial-stained teeth in a vicious grin as he met Joan's eyes.

"Just keep quiet or I'll blast you," he said. "You won't trick me like you two did Kra Kol."

Another heavy volley of atom-guns shook the ship. Joan realized suddenly that the craft was not in space, but on solid ground.

Memory rushed back to her. She remembered her stratagem to permit Curt Newton to escape, so that he might utilize the clue he had gained to the radium raiders' activities.

Her self-sacrificial throwing of herself in the path of the returning raider cruisers had succeeded. They had stopped to capture her. She had struggled, had felt a blow on her helmet, then all had been darkness.

"Where are we?" Joan asked. Then, as she twisted her head to glance out through the porthole, she cried: "Why this is Mars!"

"You've been unconscious a good while," admitted the ratlike Mercurian.

JOAN was appalled by the scene she glimpsed. The Falcon and the three other raider cruisers had landed on a field of snow she identified as on Mars because it was lighted by two moons. The ships' heavy atom-guns were playing bolts of force upon the side of a small black mountain.

She saw the brilliant blasts of energy tear open a hole in the side of the mountain, uncovering a tunnel. At once, the firing ceased. Raiders charged across the snow into the tunnel.

In a half-hour, Joan saw them emerging, carrying small, heavy lead boxes. She was witnessing a raid on a secret Martian radium hoard!

Ru Ghur's triumphant voice rang through the ship.

"We've got it—the last radium we needed! At last we can show the System what we're going to do with it! Take off for base immediately."

The raider cruisers rose from the Martian polar snow and tore out into space. They headed upward, away from the Solar System.

Joan's heart sank. They were on their way back to mysterious Outlaw World, somewhere outside the System.

Ru Ghur entered, and a bland smile creased his moonlike yellow face.

"Conscious again, Miss Randall? You gave us a lot of trouble. And all you accomplished was to get Captain Future killed."

"You can't make me believe he's dead," Joan answered. "You wouldn't have dared go into that meteor swarm after him."

The fat Uranian chuckled. "We didn't have to. We simply blasted the swarm with our batteries. And even if he escaped that, he would soon run out of oxygen and would perish even more miserably."

The ships were rushing out into space at a terrific rate. Joan glanced through the port-hole, glimpsed the System falling away beneath them.

"Ah, you're wondering where we're going?" Ru Ghur smiled.

"I don't care if Outlaw World is at the other end of the universe," Joan said firmly. "Curt and the Futuremen will track you down."

He laughed, and left her.

A few hours later, she was surprised when the four raider ships abruptly changed course. They headed back toward the System, in a sweeping curve. And Joan's mystification increased when she saw that their course now apparently had for its goal the Sun itself.

Lower and lower toward the Sun rushed the four vessels. It began to get uncomfortably hot in the Falcon. Then the girl agent heard anti-heaters begin their familiar hum, and the temperature eased off somewhat.

Ru Ghur returned and seemed amused by her astonishment.

"No, Outlaw World isn't in the Sun as you may be thinking," he said. "But it's close to it."

"Vulcan!" exclaimed Joan. "No, it couldn't be!"

"But it is," the fat Uranian assured. "Yes, Vulcan is Outlaw World. The mysterious place that everyone has been hunting for, has been right here in the center of the System all the time."

"But it's a molten world," Joan said incredulously.

Ru Ghur smiled. "Everyone has always thought so. But I had long believed differently. My particular field of science was radiation, and I had studied Vulcan with the idea of setting up a station there for research into solar radiation. My study of the little world, especially its low specific gravity, made me believe it might be partly habitable.

"So a year ago I risked my life on that belief when Captain Future and his band hunted me out of the Solar System because of my Lethe-ray. My little ship couldn't possibly reach another star, but it had anti-heaters. So I made for Vulcan, and found that my theory was correct. Vulcan offered me a safe refuge."

Ru Ghur's small eyes glistened. "It offered me more than that, for I saw how Vulcan could be used as a weapon against the whole System, a weapon that would make me unconquerable! All I would need was radium, for power. So, I assembled a force of raiders

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and then went after that radium."

"And after every raid you've been heading out into deep space, then doubling back to Vulcan!" Joan exclaimed.

THE four raider ships were now dropping through a terrific glare toward the surface of the solar satellite. Joan gasped as she saw it through the port-hole. For the whole surface of Vulcan was a semi-liquid mass of burning rock, a molten plain. No ship could land on it.

"You're beginning to think that poor old Ru Ghur is crazy?" mocked the fat Uranian. "Wait—in a moment you'll see."

Then Joan saw that below them was a big, crater like opening in the burning surface. The four raider ships descended straight down into that open pit! It was brilliantly illuminated by the glare of the Sun, and she saw that a little way down the molten rock gave way to solid rock.

The ships approached the bottom of the pit. Massive metal-lined tubes were set around its sides, but Joan paid them no attention as she gazed downward, stunned. The ships were dropping into a vast, open space inside Vulvan.

"Vulcan is a hollow world!" she gasped.

"And inside it is my base." Ru Ghur nodded. He added, "In a way, I regret that you are learning the mystery of Outlaw World. For of course this seals your fate."

CHAPTER XVII

In the Solar Satellite

LOOKING down from the Comet at the burning, molten surface of Vulcan, Captain Future could hardly believe his eyes. He had been so sure that the solar satellite somehow must be habitable despite the heat. Now his convictions were rudely shattered.

"Chief, what are we going to do?" cried Grag.

"There's only one thing we can do," declared Ezra Gurney. "Get away from the Sun at once."

"We couldn't make it out of the heat-zone before our fuel gave out," rapped Curt. "There must be some habitable refuge on Vulcan. Our only chance now is to find it in time."

The others looked skeptical, but did not protest his decision, though a fiery death seemed inevitable.

"If there is some refuge here, that's where Ru Ghur's base is," Captain Future said positively. "And that's where his radium hoard is. See if the radium compass shows anything, Simon."

The Brain manipulated the radium detecting instrument to sweep the molten little world over which the Comet hovered.

"The radium's here, all right," reported the Brain. "We're so close to it that it's almost blown out the compass. It's located about a quarter of the way around the equator."

Instantly Curt Newton started the Comet screaming around the equator of the Sun-scorched satellite.

All the Vulcan's surface was molten rock. There was no sign of anything solid.

"The whole surface must be like this," muttered Otho gloomily.

They reached the point on the equator that Simon had indicated. All strained their eyes against the terrific glare, to peer downward.

"Nothing but burning rock!" exclaimed Bork King. "And if we die here, Mars dies and Ru Ghur escapes vengeance!"

"Wait a minute!" Curt exclaimed sharply. "There's something down there—a crater or hole of some kind."

He sent the ship swooping down in a long slant until they were hanging above what looked like a big circular natural crater a mile in diameter. Captain Future, peering intently down through the lookout-lens, glimpsed a vast space into which the crater debouched. He felt a staggering shock of enlightenment.

"Outlaw World!" he cried. "Why didn't we guess it from the low specific gravity of Vulcan?"

The Brain was first to understand. "Then Vulcan is hollow?"

Curt nodded excitedly. "This crater through the crust is a way down into it. And inside, protected from the solar heat, Ru Ghur's raiders have their base!" His eyes flashed. "We're going down! Grag, you and Otho stand ready at the proton-cannon."

"Oughtn't we to notify the Planet Patrol headquarters of this, first?" protested Ezra.

"You couldn't get a telaudio message through the inferno of static caused by this raging solar radiation," Captain Future retorted.

He dropped the Comet into the crater. The ship sank downward, as into a great rock well. It was not dark. The solar brilliance struck straight down into the pit and the unguessable spaces within it.

The walls of the pit were solid rock. Only the surface layer was molten. Then as the ship dropped lower, they glimpsed the end of the shaft.

"Look at those big tubes set in the walls!" Bork King exclaimed. "That's no natural formation."

The hollow tubes, ten feet in diameter, ran obliquely into the rock. They appeared to

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have been heavily lined with a gray refractory metal.

"They look just like giant rocket-tubes," commented Otho. "If Ru Ghur's band did that, what's their idea?"

That detonated a flash of terrible enlightenment in Captain Future's mind. He suddenly understood the purpose of those tubes. More, he fathomed now the Titanic nature of Ru Ghur's plans, and the awful consequences it would have on the System's peoples.

"So that's what Ru Ghur plans to do with the stolen radium!" he said hoarsely. "But if he properly understood celestial mechanics, he'd know that it means a ghastly disaster!"

"What do you mean?" cried Bork King. "What are those tubes for?"

But the Brain already had grasped Captain Future's meaning.

"If Ru Ghur tries that," he cried, "he'll wreck the whole Solar System!"

AGHAST as Curt Newton was at the appalling revelation of Ru Ghur's Titanic plan and its terrible implications, he had no time for reflection upon it. For their ship had entered the hollow world inside Vulcan, and they stared in startled silence as the Comet dropped lower.

"A hidden world that the System has never dreamed existed!" cried Otho, thunderstruck.

The inner world of Vulcan was like the interior of a hollow ball, hundred of miles across. It was illuminated to greenish daylight by the dazzling brilliance of the great Beam that struck straight across it.

The whole concave inner surface was blanketed by dense, palegreen jungles. At one point glimmered the waters of a large yellow lake, into which ran several small, glittering rivers. Wispy clouds floating in the inner vault, and the whistle of air outside the falling Comet, told them that this hollow world had an atmosphere.

"A habitable world inside the solar satellite," Ezra Gurney whispered. "Protected from the heat, havin' air an' water—"

"What's that black belt across the opposite face?" Grag demanded. The robot was pointing at a wide, seared black band that ran straight through the jungles opposite the pit side.

"It's the path of the Beam," Curt said quickly. "As Vulcan rotates on its axis, the Beam of solar radiance must angle across that path. When the pit side of Vulcan is turned away from the Sun, it would be night in here."

"Where's Ru Ghur's base?" demanded Bork King, with single-minded purpose.

"I don't know, but he's sure to spot us if we keep cruising around in here," Captain Future said. "We've got to land, then reconnoiter on foot."

"Why don't we cruise around till we find the base, then blast it and all Ru Ghur's band with our heavy guns?" Bork King demanded.

"Joan is still in Ru Ghur's hands," Curt reminded him tightly.

He swung the Comet out of the Beam, whose blinding brilliance he hoped had so far protected them from discovery. Grag cut off their anti-heaters to save fuel.

"There must be copper here that we can refuel with," muttered the robot. "The raiders would have to have it."

The little ship whistled down toward the dense green jungle. Curt found a small opening and landed there.

The air-test dials showed that the atmosphere outside was hot, but breathable. Carrying their atom-pistols, they emerged.

"What a place!" exclaimed Ezra. "It's as if we were on some far-off star."

They were standing on pale grass amid tall, grotesque ferns that towered high above their heads. Spiky shrubs bearing great golden flowers grew in the greenish gloom beneath the ferns. Big, bright-winged insects buzzed past. The oppressively hot air had a rank jungle smell.

Captain Future looked tensely upward. The horizon seemed to curve vaguely right up into the sky as his eye followed the curve of the inner world. The Beam clove the sky like a sword of fiery radiance.

"The radium compass will tell us where Ru Ghur's radium lies, and that's where his base will be," Curt said swiftly.

When he and Simon Wright operated the instrument it pointed to a spot near the pit opening. That was not many miles from where they stood.

"I thought Ru Ghur's base would be near the pit, after I saw those giant rocket-tubes there!" Captain Future exclaimed.

"Chief, are those rocket-tubes?" Otho asked puzzled. "Why in the world did he install them?"

"They're designed to fire a tremendous combined blast that would propel Vulcan into space like a huge ship," Curt said.

"You mean Ru Ghur's great scheme is to propel Vulcan out of its orbit?" cried Ezra, aghast. "But he hasn't enough power for that!

"He's got his stolen radium to furnish super-atomic power," Curt Newton reminded somberly. "What he doesn't realize is that if he moves Vulcan, there'll be awful consequences to—"

He was suddenly interrupted by a weird sound that floated through the brooding green gloom of the jungle—a thin screaming as of scores of voices, with something shrill and unhuman about them. Then the hideous

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clamor died away.

"I never heard any beasts make sounds like that," said Grag uneasily.

"Life must have developed into some strange forms in this isolated world," muttered the Brain.

"We must start for Ru Ghur's base without further delay," Curt said urgently. "But Simon, I want you to stay here in the Comet with Ezra. If anything happens to us, you must take word out to the System of what Ru Ghur is planning to do!"

The Brain gravely agreed. "That danger is too terrible to take chances with. While we're waiting for you, I'll search for a copper supply."

CAPTAIN FUTURE and his three comrades started through the dense thickets of towering ferns, toward the pit. It was easy to check their direction, since they had merely to look up into the "sky" at the great Beam that entered through the pit.

The Beam, they soon noticed, was slowly shifting as the rotation of Vulcan slowly turned the pit opening away from the Sun.

"It will soon be night here," muttered Curt. "That should make it easier for some of us to enter Ru Ghur's stronghold."

"All I ask is to get that Uranian's fat face over the sights of my atom-pistol," grated Bork King.

Captain Future's own mind was in a turmoil of apprehension. Added to his anxiety for Joan was the new and terrible fear that had chilled him ever since he had realized Ru Ghur's daring plan. To move Vulcan out of its orbit was to bring catastrophe to the whole System!

Grag, had brought Eek along. The little moon pup rode his shoulder, his bright, beady eyes peering inquisitively at everything, while Oog trotted along at Otho's heels. Once Eek went into such a frenzy of fright that they knew he had sensed danger by means of his queer telepathic faculty.

They stopped, looking alertly about. Suddenly the ground ahead seemed to upheave in a slimy, gelatinous mass that flopped toward them. A weird, monstrous protozooan creature had been lying there, camouflaged, and waiting for them to step into it. They hastily detoured.

Flocks of flying creatures like enormous dragon-flies whirred up out of the ferns. These were sometimes pursued by big bat-like flying squirrels that caught and crunched them in mid-air.

They soon discovered that the plant life of the inner world was as weird. The fern jungle gave way to a forest of bush trees with each thick green limb ending in an enormous flat leaf. These grotesque leaves hung limp, as though the trees were dead. But the instant that Captain Future and his party entered that glade, the trees came to life. The great leaves whipped wildly, vibrating rapidly to cause a shrill, screaming sound that was deafening.

"Get out of here!" yelled Captain Future. "This noise will bring all Ru Ghur's band down on us!"

They stumbled back out of the horrible glade, and the trees quieted.

"Those screaming trees are what we heard before!" gasped Otho. "That noise is enough to drive anyone mad."

"It must happen often, when animals get into that forest," Curt said. "The raiders may take no notice."

But they went forward with more caution, giving the forest of screaming trees a wide berth. Curt Newton set a faster pace, since it would soon be night. Then he noticed that Eek, was again showing evidences of extreme fright. The moon pup peered with frightened eyes into the jungle on either side.

"We're being trailed by creatures of some kind," Captain Future muttered. "Eek senses them."

"I can't see or hear anything," said Bork King, his eyes searching the jungle. "Do you suppose it's Ru Ghur's band?"

Captain Future had had no time to answer when out of the green gloom of the jungle whistled a shower of half-seen things like streaks of light. He yelled and the others ducked instantly.

Those streaks of light were flying spears, that grazed above their heads.

CHAPTER XVIII

Citadel of Evil

WITH a chorus of fierce yells, scores of men poured out of the jungle all around them. They were not the Uranian's motley raiders. These men were pale-skinned and had pure white hair. They wore white leather tunics, and carried spears. White savages, natives of Vulcan's inner world!

Before Curt and Otho and Bork King could use their atom-pistols, Grag went into action. He had been hit by a dozen of the flying spears. They had rattled harmlessly off the robot's metal figure, but they had made him angry.

With a bellow of rage he strode into the midst of the attackers, ignoring the spears. He picked up two of them in his mighty arms and flung them violently back into the ferns. He was grabbing for a couple more when the

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barbaric attackers, with yells of terror, retreated in panic from this giant metal man their weapons could not harm.

"Otho, wait!" shouted Captain Future as the android leveled his atom-pistol. "Don't fire! They've had enough."

The white-skinned savage horde had ceased to hurl their spears. They were chattering in panic, their eyes fixed on Grag.

"They think Grag's superhuman," Curt said quickly. "Play up to them, Grag."

Grag was not reluctant. Assuming a majestic posture, he raised his metal arm and struck himself on the chest. His photo-electric eyes glared at the shrinking savages.

"I'm Grag, the toughest guy on nine planets!" he boomed. "I tear apart moons with my bare hands, and eat meteors for breakfast."

The savages, of course, could not understand. But the impressive voice of the giant robot completed their demoralization. One stalwart young white-haired man who seemed the leader, hastily raised his hand in the gesture of peace.

"We were mistaken in attacking you, Great One!" he yelped. "We thought you belonged to the evil ones."

Captain Future could understand the man, for he spoke in a debased variant of that ancient Denebian language which is heard everywhere in the galaxy where the sons of Deneb ages ago planted colonies.

"These people are native Vulcanians," Curt said.

"Then the pioneers of Denab must have planted a colony in here long ago, just as they colonized the other worlds!" cried Otho.

Captain Future spoke to the Vulcanian leader, carefully choosing words of the ancient Denebian tongue.

"We have just landed upon this world of yours," he said. "Who are you, and who are the evil ones of whom you speak?"

"I am Kah, chieftain of my village," the young Vulcanian chief answered. "The evil ones are men much like yourselves, except that their leader is fat and yellow of skin."

"He means Ru Ghur and his band!" exclaimed Bork King in excitement.

"You Vulcanians then are enemies of the evil ones?" Curt asked.

Kah's eyes flashed. "They have sorely oppressed us. Yet when the first of them came—the fat, yellow-skinned one—hundreds of days ago, we were friendly to him. He came into our world in a small ship, and we made him welcome, venerated him because of his magic powers. We showed him where were certain metals he desired. Then he left, but soon returned with other ships and many men. And they were all evil!

"They seized our ancient temple and made it their citadel. They forced many of us to become their slaves. So we turned against the evil ones and attacked their citadel. But they repelled our attacks, for they have weapons that blast fiery death and have also one great weapon with which they can stun our minds with strange dreams whenever we come near their stronghold."

"You hear?" Curt Newton asked the others excitedly. "Ru Ghur and his raiders are at war with these Vulcanians, and have put up a powerful Lethe-ray projector to repel attacks."

He swung back to Kah. "We too are enemies of the evil ones, and have tracked them here to destroy them."

Kah and his tribesmen uttered eager cries.

"We're on our way to find the stronghold of the evil ones now," Captain Future said. "Will you guide us to it?"

Kah's face fell. "It is death to go near it. The screaming trees around it give warning of anyone's approach, and the evil ones use their terrible weapons." Then the chieftain's expression hardened. "But I will guide you. I may help you through the screaming trees, but I do not know how you will enter the citadel."

"We'll get in if we have to blast our way," muttered Bork King.

KAH spoke to his tribesmen more rapidly than the Futuremen could follow. All but two of the Vucanians vanished into the fern jungle.

"Where did you send them?" Curt demanded.

"To gather all our warriors," Kah answered. "If you are able to force an entrance to the stronghold of the evil ones, we will follow you in and destroy them.

"Lead the way," Captain Future said urgently. "We have no time to lose."

Kah looked up into the sky, where the Beam now was rapidly fading out. He and his two remaining tribesmen made a sign of religious reverence toward it.

"It will be night long before we reach the place," said Kah. "The darkness may help us approach."

With their guides, the Futuremen and the big Martian resumed their march through the darkening fern jungles, toward the great pit opening. The Beam died out completely. The surface of Vulcan in which the pit opening had rotated away from the Sun. But the darkness which quickly fell over the jungles was relieved somewhat by a pale, refracted afterglow.

The fern forest seemed to teem with life, rustling, whispering and stirring. Presently Captain Future made out that they were skirting a crumbled stone ruin, that loomed black and brooding in the dark.

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"Did your people build that?" Curt asked Kah.

Kah shook his head. "We have not such magic powers. But our ancestors were like gods in their power. They reared great structures and cities, and had flying ships and fire-blasting weapons like those of the evil ones. The greatest of those buildings of our ancestors was our most sacred temple, in which we worshipped the Beam. But the evil ones took our temple from us."

"So these are the descendants of ancient Denebian colonists," muttered Otho. "This is a lost, decayed outpost of that great galactic empire."

Kah made a sign of warning a little later, and they halted.

"We are near the evil ones' citadel," he whispered. "But the screaming trees will instantly give warning unless we are careful."

Captain Future saw ahead of them an extensive forest of the strange trees, their big leaves hanging limp.

"Walk as softly and slowly as you can," Kah was warning. "Any sudden movement will set the trees in uproar."

He led the way into the weird forest, moving on tiptoe. Captain Future followed, with Otho and Grag and big Bork King close behind him. Placing their feet with deliberate care each step, they entered the forest of the screaming trees.

Captain Future thought he understood now, that the weird trees were so highly sensitive to vibrations of the ground that such vibrations set off their hideous clamor.

Grag had to move most slowly of them all, for it was not easy for the giant robot to walk silently. Eek cowered on his shoulder, apparently the prey to extreme fright.

"Thank space that moon pup has no voice," Curt thought. "If he had, he'd be yelling now."

The forest of screaming trees seemed without end. Sooner or later, some accident would surely start the whole forest raging, Curt thought. Then he glimpsed lights ahead. He recognized that blue glimmer as krypton light. They were emerging from the perilous forest.

"Down, quickly!" exclaimed Kah as they came out of the forest onto open ground. "That is the citadel of the evil ones, ahead!"

They flattened themselves in the grass. Captain Future studied the place that loomed up in the darkness a hundred yards ahead.

"It's Ru Ghur's stronghold, all right!" whispered Otho. "See, there are their ships!"

In the darkness rose the black stone mass of a great, ancient building. In cross section, it was an elongated oval. Its frowning sides had formerly supported a big central dome and two smaller ones, but those on the right had fallen in. The massive wall had also fallen in, in many places.

Blue krypton lights flared in the ruined castle. Their lights glinted off the hulls of the four raider cruisers parked inside the wall. From the dome on the left came in intermittent sound of throbbing machinery.

"This place isn't more than a half-mile from the pit that leads out to the surface of Vulcan," Curt muttered.

HE WAS remembering the giant rocket-tubes imbedded in that pit shaft to fire outward, and propel Vulcan in space. The power-plant for those tubes was in this ancient stronghold.

"Hear that throbbing?" Grag exclaimed. "That's cyclotrons being tested, and mighty big ones from the sound of them!"

Bork King started forward, pistol in hand. "Then that's where the cursed Uranian and his stolen radium is!"

Captain Future grabbed the Martian's arm. "Wait, Bork! We can't bull our way in like that. There are a couple of hundred men in there." He turned to Kah and asked: "Are guards usually posted around the place? I don't see any."

Kah was sweating with fear. "It is guarded by phantoms. If a man goes too close to the wall, alarms sound and the evil ones use their fire weapons and their terrible weapon that destroys the mind."

"Invisible electric-eye circuits around the wall," Curt muttered. "But I think we can get through them. But remember, our first business is to get Joan out of there. Then we'll smash Ru Ghur." He told the Vulcanian chieftain in a rapid whisper, "You and your men wait here for your warriors. But make no move to attack the castle until I give you a signal of five quick blasts of my fire-weapon."

He took a tiny instrument from his pocket—a little detector extremely sensitive to electric energy.

"I brought this in case Ru Ghur had traps set around his base," he said. "Let me go first. Keep down and make no sound."

They crawled forward toward the ominous black mass of the citadel. Captain Future kept the little detector outstretched in his left hand, his right hand gripping his atom-pistol.

As they approached the wall, they could hear voices inside it. Then again came the mighty throbbing of huge cyclotrons—and Captain Future knew that the radium-fueled power of those cyclotrons was intended by Ru Ghur to hurl Vulcan out of its orbit, which would entail cosmic catastrophe.

The detector emitted a tiny buzzing. The almost inaudible sound was a warning that electric-eye circuits were across their path.

"Don't move!" Curt muttered. "I'll see just

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where the rays are."

It was a ticklish situation, fraught with deadly danger. If they allowed the electric-eye rays to detect their presence all would be lost just at a moment when a chance at victory and the defeat of Ru Ghur was in sight.

Captain Future was well aware of the importance of extreme caution.

He slowly moved the detector up and down and discovered, by the increase and decrease of its buzzing, that there were no less than four electric-eye rays across their path, at heights of one, three, five, and seven feet.

"We'll have to slide between the two bottom rays, without touching them," he said. "One at a time, now."

He went first. It was like clambering through the bars of a fence, but these bars were invisible and the slightest touch against them would give the alarm.

He stood watching as the others readied themselves to come through. He saw their tenseness and he knew they realized the peril of even the slightest misstep.

Otho came through after him with ease, and Bork King carefully followed. Getting Grag through was the hardest job for the mighty metal body of the robot would barely pass between the unseen rays.

"Quick, get in the shadow of the wall!" Curt whispered. "Then we can take a look inside."

They crouched down outside the crumbling wall, where it was less than five feet high. Then, leaning over it, they looked into a vast stone-paved court which surrounded the oval castle and was itself surrounded by the wall. The four raider cruisers were parked some distance to their left. Blue krypton lights and voices came from open windows.

Captain Future saw no one except a few raiders loitering by the distant ships. Bork King pointed suddenly upward. On what was left of the ruined central dome, there was a light metal platform on which were mounted heavy atom-guns and an object like a big searchlight.

"A big Lethe-ray projector," Captain Future murmured.

He turned as he felt Otho come up beside him.

"Chief, someone's coming this way!" Otho warningly hissed. The android's keen ears had caught the sound of footsteps.

They glimpsed a slight figure coming along the dark courtyard. Captain Future felt an incredulous joy as the figure crossed a bar of krypton light. He recognized the pale, lovely face of Joan Randall.

He sprang over the wall. The girl turned quickly, startled.

"Joan!" he whispered joyfully. "It's Curt! I'm going to get you out!"

CHAPTER XIX

Defeat

UNRECOGNIZING, and amazed, Joan stared at Curt Newton. Then, to his horror, she recoiled from him fearfully and her lips parted to utter a cry of alarm. But she never uttered it, for in a flash Captain Future darted forward and clapped a hand over her mouth smothering her cry.

The stiffness of her white face and the vague expression in her eyes had told him instantly that she was in a mental daze. She struggled weakly as he hastily dragged her over the low wall into the shadow.

"Imps of Pluto, what's the matter with Joan?" gasped Otho.

Curt Newtons' voice was a hoarse whisper. "Ru Ghur has been keeping her under the Lethe-ray until she's in a complete mental fog." He hurried on hopefully. "But we can soon bring her back to herself. She must be taken to the Comet at once. You've must do that, Otho."

"Leave you and Grag and Bork King to see it through alone?" Otho objected strenuously. "I won't do it!"

"You'll obey my orders!" Curt Newton flared. Then his voice lowered to earnestness. "You're the only one of us agile enough to get her through that barrier without setting off the alarms. And we won't be alone against the radiers. The Vulcanians are gathering out there in the forest. We're going to wreck the Lethe-ray projector and heavy atom-guns, then the Vulcanian warriors can attack. We'll overwhelm the raiders. But it will make a devil's playground of this place, and I want Joan out."

"Eek will go back with you too," Grag added anxiously. "I've given him telepathic orders to follow you."

Otho snorted. "Don't worry. If that moon pup heard a fight start, he'd turn himself inside out getting away."

Joan had been struggling weakly to escape Curt's grasp. But he had held her firmly, his hand over her lips. He knew she was so dazed by long imprisonment under the Lethe-ray that Ru Ghur had not even found it necessary to confine her more closely.

Otho took her from him now. The lithe android picked her up like a child, his fingers muffling her lips, and turned away.

"I'll be back with Simon and Ezra in the Comet, to pitch in when you lead the Vul-

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canian attack!" he whispered. "Nobody is going to do me out of this fight!"

He moved cautiously back through the darkness, Oog and Eek trotting behind him. Since the little animals could pass easily under the lower ray of the electric-eye barrier, they presented no danger.

Immediately Captain Future, Bork King, and Grag vaulted over the low wall into the court.

"Now to kill Ru Ghur!" muttered the Martian, starting fiercely toward the far end of the court.

"Bork, wait—not that way!" whispered Curt. "First we've got to wreck the Lethe-ray projector and guns up there. Then I'll signal Kah's warriors, and they'll keep the raiders' hands full while we get to Ru Ghur and his machines."

Curt leaped across the courtyard into the shadow of the citadel's side. They started along it toward the central dome where the powerful weapons were mounted.

Before they had taken five steps there came a sudden clangor of alarm bells.

"Devils of space!" groaned Gragg. "Otho's set off the electric-eye alarms!"

Ru Ghur's voice was yelling orders somewhere, lights snapped on to flood the whole citadel with brilliance, and alarmed raiders came pouring out of the great pile.

"I'll get Ru Ghur, anyway!" yelled Bork King. The bloodthirsty Martian ran forward.

But Captain Future sprang toward the light metal stair that led to the paltform on which the Lethe-ray projector and guns were set. He heard a deafening clamor from the forest of screaming trees, and despite the disaster of his own plans, he felt a sharp relief. That sound meant that Otho was getting out through the forest with Joan.

"Chief, look out!" bellowed Grag.

Raiders had spilled out of a door immediately beside him, and blue light disclosed Curt Newton and the big robot to them.

CAPTAIN Future spun around and shot—to kill. His crackling atom-blasts cut down the front ranks of them. With a bellowing, booming cry Grag leaped into the midst of the others.

"Go ahead, Chief—I'll hold 'em!" roared the robot.

Atom-blasts crashed blindingly farther along the court, and Curt Newton glimpsed Bork King, mad with fanatic desire for vengeance, triggering into the raiders charging him.

Grag was the center of a mass of raiders who were clinging to the mighty robot's limbs, dragging him from his feet.

Captain Future had leaped up the first steps of the little stair when he heard a hoarse yell, jerked his head around and saw Kra Kol behind him. The Saturnian's face was convulsed with hatred and his atom-pistol was leveled.

"You're the one who tricked me on the Falcon!" he cried thickly as he pulled trigger.

Curt Newton aimed and fired in one lightninglike movement, and saw the Saturnian's chest scorched by the crashing blast. But Kra Kol was pulling trigger as he died. The whole world seemed to explode in blinding light, to Captain Future. . . .

He came to himself, to find the whole right side of his head aching with hot, burning pain. Numbly he understood that Kra Kol's atom-blast had grazed his temple.

He opened his eyes. He was chained against the wall of a brightly lighted room as vast as the vault of a cathedral. Its dome of black stone curved high over his head. Huge machines crowded the room.

Bork King and Grag were similarly chained. The Martian was wounded seriously, but Grag, though a little battered, was making furious effort to break his chains.

"I was never taken like this in my life, before." Grag roared wrathfully. "I'll—"

[*Turn page*]

"Where Am I? What Has Happened? Am I A Prisoner?"

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The hated familiar voice of Ru Ghur interrupted him. "You will be quiet or I shall be forced to destroy your speech apparatus. You are only being kept alive because I later want to dissect you and find out if we should make any more like you."

"Dissect me?" cried Grag. The indignity threatened left him speechless.

Ru Ghur stood, a fat and almost comic figure, surveying his captives with his bland, benevolent smile.

Armed raiders came hastening in, pushing ahead of them cowering Vulcanian slaves.

"We searched the whole place and no one else got in," reported a ratlike Mercurian. "None of the slaves are gone, but the Randall girl is missing."

Ru Ghur frowned. "She must have been frightened off by the fight, for she was too drugged by the Lethe-ray to have formed any premeditated plan of escape. Search the forest for her." He turned back to Captain Future. "You've made me lots of trouble, Future. You and your friends here must be killed, of course. But I'll keep you alive long enough for you to witness my final triumph."

Bork King had said not a word. Hanging in his chains, the wounded Martian glared at Ru Ghur with a fanatic hatred burning in his eyes.

Curt Newton felt a deep bitterness at his own failure. He had lost a chance to smash this whole unholy nest of evil, once and for all.

He looked beyond the Uranian, at the gigantic machines—colossal cyclotrons. Their fuel feed lines came from the great laden bins which he knew contained radium looted from all over the Solar System. Their massive power pipes led down into the floor, and he could guess that they connected with the rocket-tubes in the great pit.

"You're all ready, aren't you?" he muttered. "All ready to use the power of these cyclotrons to hurl Vulcan out of its orbit?"

Ru Ghur looked at him admiringly. "So you guessed my purpose when you saw the rocket-tubes in the pit? Yes, that is what we are going to do. We are going to make a huge ship of Vulcan—a pirate ship! His small eyes glowed with a fire that revealed the true danger of this man, eclipsing his comic figure and fat face. "It will be the greatest adventure ever embarked upon by man! A prolonged blast of super-power will hurl Vulcan out of its orbit, and we can steer it at will through the Solar System like a planetary vessel of space.

"Do you realize what we can do with this corsair planet? We can use it as a base from which to prey upon the disorganized outer planets. We will gather here in Vulcan all the outlaws and pirates of the System, under my command. We will loot the wealth of the demoralized System, and no one will be able to attack us, since we can hold out all the battle cruisers in the System by simply firing the great rocket-tubes.

"And when we've looted the System, then we leave it forever! It will be easy to project Vulcan toward another star. There will be radium enough for atomic power to warm and light this interior world during the long traverse. The Vulcanians, whom it will be easy to subdue completely then, will be our slaves. And I will be sole master of this world-ship and all within it!"

GRAG uttered a cry of horror.

"Chief, he can't do that, can he? Has he got power enough to move Vulcan?"

"He has power enough," Captain Future said somberly. "But there is one thing he has forgotten." His eyes bored into Ru Ghur. "You don't know celestial mechanics, and you haven't realized the full effect of moving Vulcan from its orbit. To do so will remove a gravitational influence that helps keep Mercury's eccentric orbit from becoming too eccentric. The result would bring Mercury closer and closer Sunward until it finally plunges into the Sun. When a body of Mercury's dimensions crashed through the outer layers of the Sun, it would cause a 'blow-out' of imprisoned solar forces that would make the Sun explode into a nova. That would engulf all the inner planets in fiery death. You didn't realize that when you drew up your great scheme, did you?"

"I am a better scientist than you believe, Future," the Uranian answered coolly. "I have fully foreseen the cataclysm you describe."

Curt Netwon was staggered. "You know this catastrophe will happen, yet you'll still go ahead with your plan?"

Ru Ghur wagged his head in assumed sadness. "It is deplorable that so many worlds and peoples will perish. It wrings my soul to think of such dreadful happenings. But I'm afraid that can't be avoided." He added cheerfully, "But there's a brighter side. The catastrophe won't affect the outer planets. But they will be so demoralized it will not be hard to loot them before we take this planet-ship way from the System forever."

Only then, did Captain Future realize to the full the ruthlessness of this fat and flabby man. He had believed that Ru Ghur had overlooked the inevitably disastrous consequences of his scheme.

"We are going to start tonight," Ru Ghur was saying. "In an hour, Vulcan will have rotated to a position in which its pit opening will point in just the right directon for the blast that will take it from its orbit."

"Ru Ghur!" Curt urged hoarsely. "Think

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of Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars and maybe even Jupiter perishing, with all their millions, in the solar explosion. You can't want that to happen!"

Ru Ghur shrugged his fat shoulders. "I'm sorry that it is necessary. But I can't allow my sentimental side to overrule my practical judgment."

As they stared at him in unbelieving horror, the ratlike Mercurian raider and a half-dozen of his men reentered— with Joan Randall. She was still dazed, sunken in dreams. She looked at them without recognition, like a stunned child.

"We found her in the fern forest," the Mercurian raider reported. "She was wandering back here."

Curt Newton groaned inwardly. Something had happened to Otho on his way back to the Comet with the dazed girl. Whatever it was, Joan had found herself free and, in her drugged condition, had wandered back to the citadel.

Ru Ghur was snapping orders to the Mercurian.

"Future's ship is somewhere out there, and the Brain is probably in it. Hunt it out, and destroy it." He added warningly, "Get back here within forty minutes. For then we're going to fire the first great blast, and that will rock this world."

Curt felt a desperate hopelessness. What chance had they now to avert disaster? They were hunting the Comet, the raiders in the citadel were on guard, and no attack of the Vulcanians could hope to succeed.

And the minutes were ticking by toward the fateful moment when Vulcan would blast out of its age-old orbit, with all the appalling consequences to the life of the Solar System that would bring!

CHAPTER XX

Dark Battle

VAINLY struggling Captain Future shook to the apocalyptic vision of the dread disaster that rushed through his mind. Soon those colossal cyclotrons would start throbbing, and the energies they derived from radium fuel would rush through the underground power pipes to the rocket-tubes in the pits.

The awful blast would tear Vulcan out of its orbit—and this little world would become an Outlaw World in direst truth. A pirate planetoid, speeding out through the System to loot the civilized planets. Behind it, Mercury would be dislodged and spiral slowly into the Sun to cause the explosion that would wipe out half the System.

"I can't let it happen!" Curt Newton thought wildly. "There must be some way to stop it!"

He made more desperate efforts to wrench free of his chains, but with no result except to further bruise his already bleeding wrists.

As though to mock his despair, Ru Ghur was at the tall switchboard inspecting chronometers, gauges and switches. Joan had gone to the Uranian's side and was watching in a lackadaisical way.

"It will soon be time to start the big cycs," Ru Ghur was saying. "They must be running full capacity when we fire the first blast."

Suddenly all the krypton lights in the citadel went out. They were plunged into smothering darkness.

"The Randall girl tore out the wires of the light circuit!" Ru Ghur's yell pierced the dark. "Grab her!"

There was a whirling confusion in the darkness—running feet, shouting raiders, wailing Vulcanian slaves.

Captain Future was thunderstruck. Had Joan's ray-drugged mind already been brought back to normal by Simon out there in the Comet? No, that was impossible. She had not been away long enough for that.

Curt felt a hand suddenly jam an atom-pistol into his belt.

"Lean forward in your chains, all three of you!" a familiar voice whispered in his ear. "I'll blast you free with my gun."

"Otho!" Curt whispered back, but had no time to question the android's mystifying reappearance. Here was the desperate chance for which he had hoped.

He leaned forward to the limit of the chains. A gun's atom-blast crashed and he felt the chains part. As he tore them from his wrists, the atom-gun crashed twice again.

"Future and the others are breaking loose!" shrilled Ru Ghur. "Block the doorway! And find that girl and kill her!"

Captain Future faced a terrible choice there. His every instinct cried for him to find Joan and assure her safety. But if he did, and missed the chance to wreck Ru Ghur's Titanic and terrible scheme, he would be betraying his duty to the System. In a torturing breath that seemed an eternity, he made his choice.

"Otho! Grag! Bork! Make for the door! We're crashing out!"

He heard Grag's metal feet and the lithe stride of the android as they blundered through the dark doorway. They crashed into raiders swarming to block the door.

Grag's mighty arms whirled and the vaguely glimpsed enemies went down like

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tenpins. Curt, Grag, and Otho burst out into the night.

Curt was wild with fear for Joan, whom he was leaving in deadly peril in that dark room. But he did not waver in his desperate resolution.

"The gun platform on the central dome!" he cried hoarsely. "If we can let the Vulcanian warriors in we've got a chance!"

The court was almost as dark as the room they had quitted. But, searchlights suddenly sliced white beams through the obscurity. The searchlights were on the raider cruisers, which had been about to take off on the search for the Comet.

"Get those lights!" yelled Captain Future.

He plunged across the court shooting at the ships. The streaks of blasting force from his atom-pistol smashed out two of the searchlights. He heard Otho's gun crash, and the other two lights went out.

Raiders streamed out of the ships, running toward them, their guns blazing. The fiery blasts crisscrossed in front of Curt as he reached the stair that led to the gun platform.

He went up the stair shooting, for he had glimpsed the two raiders now on guard there swinging around the heavy atom-guns. These two dropped lifeless beneath their weapons.

"Don't use those heavy guns on the citadel!" Curt yelled to Grag and Otho. "Give the signal to Kah!"

The heavy atom-guns would bring the citadel crashing down on all within it. It was not only of Joan's saefty that he was thinking, but also of Bork King, and the pitiful Vulcanian slaves.

CURT was fumbling with the base of the big Lethe-ray projector. He counted on it being on a different circuit than the krypton lights, and he was right. For when his fingers closed the switch, he heard the generator of the deadly ray begin its deep hum.

Otho's pistol crashed five times into the air. And that signal was answered by a roar of hundreds of fierce voices out in the dark forests.

"They're coming up the stair!" yelled Crag.

Other searchlights had come on from the raider ships, their white beams lighting up the courtyard. Curt Newton glimpsed the mass of raiders pressing up the stair toward him.

Deafening blasts of atomic fire streaked past his head as the raiders turned loose their guns. But instantly Curt swung the Lethe-ray projector to point straight down at them. The invisible beam stopped them in their tracks. They staggered and collapsed, lying sprawled in heaps. The Lethe-ray, suddenly dazing them with drugging dream, had knocked them out of the battle.

Captain Future heard a new voice yell ou in the dark.

"Strike down the evil ones! Kill them all!

Kah and his Vulcanian warriors wer coming over the wall! Savage tribesme spears raised, were finally getting a chanc to avenge themselves on Ru Ghur's brut band.

Raiders, seeing that horde breaking i turned to fire at these savage attacker Others inside the citadel were lunging ou to join the fighting.

Captain Future swung the invisible, super powered Lethe-ray upon them. As its poter beam leaped from one to another, the raider sagged dazedly.

Kah and Vulcanians rushed forward to ki them.

"Kah, don't kill them—just disarm them! Curt Newton shouted down. "They're harm less now!"

For a moment it looked as though Ka would not be able to restrain his warrior from wreaking a bloody vengeance. The slowly they obeyed, disarming the stunne men.

"We've smashed them!" Grag bellowe joyfully.

"Ru Ghur's still in the citadel and Joa is too!" Curt cried hoarsely, plunging towar the stair.

"Joan is safe, Chief!" called Otho. "Look!

Curt swung around. His jaw dropped i amazement. By the beams of the search lights, he saw that behind him were Gra and Joan, and no one else.

"Joan, how did you get here?" he crie "Where's Otho?"

Joan performed a startling action the "She" raised a hand to wipe make-up fro her face, snatched away false dark hair. Th hairless white head and pale face of Oth confronted them. He grinned at their amaze ment.

"I was the Joan who came back to th citadel," he said. "During the fight in th dark, you couldn't see me."

Curt was stunned. "You always were master of disguise," he muttered, "but thi one fooled me completely. But where i Joan?"

"In the Comet," Otho answered. "By nov Simon will have made her mind clear agai She was so drugged she struggled all th way, and set off the alarms. But once I g her to the ship I disguised myself and cam back to the citadel. Ru Ghur allowed he freedom because she was so helpless. Tha would give me a chance, in her guise, to hel you."

"You did more than just help, Otho," Cu

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said feelingly. "All the credit for preventing disaster belongs to you." Then he suddenly remembered. "But Ru Ghur's still down in the citadel!"

What if the defeated Uranian should fire the great rocket-tubes in a final gesture of hate!

They forced their way through the crowded courtyard, where Kah's warriors were joyfully greeting the Vulcanian slaves. They burst into the citadel. The vast room of cyclotrons was still dark and silent. Otho groped at the switchboard until he restored the light circuit he had torn away. The kryptons came on, lighting the room with blue brilliance.

"Gods of space!" exclaimed Grag. "Bork King—"

The giant Martian was on his knees, a bloody, terrible figure, his side and shoulder blasted by new wounds, but his massive red face still flamed with the light of vengeance.

"I stayed here to find Ru Ghur," he muttered thickly. "I found him."

The Uranian lay upon the floor. His neck had been broken by Bork King's great hands. He was dying. His fading eyes looked up at them dully, and his lips moved.

"You've won, Future," he whispered. "I always wished you were on my side."

The whisper dribbled into nothingness. The brilliant intellect that had almost wrecked the Solar System had gone into darkness. . . .

TWO days later, the Comet lay in the citadel courtyard ready for departure from Vulcan. The Futuremen had destroyed the great rocket-tubes, power pipes and cyclotrons upon which Ru Ghur's Vulcanian slaves had labored for so many months. Now those slaves had been restored to their people. And Kah and all the Vulcanians were here to see the departure of the Futuremen.

"We will be back soon, with other ships," Curt Newton assured them. "For we must restore the stolen radium to its owners. And when the System Government learns that this inhabited world exists inside Vulcan, and that ships can find copper here to refuel, many more will come."

"We shall keep the evil ones prisoned until you return," Kah told him.

That evil, thoroughly cowed band, would face the courts of the System Government.

Bork King, slowly recovering from his wounds, was remaining in Vulcan.

"I'll keep watch over that radium till you come for it," he offered. "I'm a Guardian of Mars, and part of that radium means life for my planet." He had squared his big shoulders as he added, "When the radium is safely back in the pump station of my world, I'll be ready to face my trial for piracy."

"Bork," Curt Newton had told him, "after the System hears my story, any court that didn't acquit you and your men would be mobbed!"

The big Martian had grinned. "You made a pretty good pirate yourself."

He and the Vulcanians waved farewell as the Comet rose toward the brilliant splendor of the Beam. The fuel bunkers were bulging with copper now, and the anti-heaters hummed as they entered the scorching glare of solar radiance.

Curt swung the little ship Earthward as soon as they emerged above Vulcan's molten surface.

From the cabin came loud voice raised in argument. Ezra Gurney had slyly provoked Grag and Otho into the perpetual dispute over the merits of their respective pets.

"And furthermore," Otho was shouting, "I warn you that I refuse to go anywhere again if you take that cowardly moon pup with you."

"Fine!" bellowed Grag's angry voice. "We'd all rather have Eek along than a cocky rubberoid imitation of a man and his miserable mascot!"

Curt Newton, for the first time in many days, had a laugh on his lips as he drew Joan closer to his side.

"At last I'm getting back to normal peace and quiet!" he said.

"You Can't Take the Unknown Road Alone!"

THAT'S what Brian Raft's companions in the Brazilian jungle told him—but he was determined to find Dan Craddock and the girl with the aquamarine eyes, and he dared to challenge mysterious forces which no man understood. And so he went deep into the jungle despite the dreaded *Curupuri* and the formidable beasts that stalked the VALLEY OF THE FLAME in the astonishing novel of that name by Keith Hammond which appears next issue!

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THE FORGOTTEN MAN OF SPACE

By P. SCHUYLER MILLER

For ten endless years Cramer is marooned on distant Mars, longing for rescue—and then men come, men whose cruelty and avarice make a grim mockery of his faith in humankind!

IN THE shaft it was pitch-black but for the glow of radium in the rock—low-grade stuff that they couldn't afford to take out—and the white beam of the torch. Here in the shaft there was enough dust to show the beam. Outside, the clear desert air was almost dustless and the beam of a torch was almost invisible, save on the darkest nights.

It was hot and stuffy in the heavy lead-lined suit. Now that the mine was gutted there probably wasn't enough radium left to harm him, but it was wise to play safe. The first prospectors had paid for their carelessness—paid horribly with their lives. Cramer shuddered. That wasn't so long ago!

He turned and went back up the long, slanting tunnel toward the spot of daylight that marked the entrance. Gronfeld was wrong for once. The electroscope wasn't down here at all. As a matter of fact, he, Cramer, had taken it up to the hut when it showed that the lode was played out. If Graham had brought it back again as Gronfeld claimed, he probably knew where it was and was keeping quiet out of spite.

Cramer frowned. When they started out, three long Martian years ago, there had been a tie stronger than lust of profit binding them together. Then Gronfeld had found the lode and it turned out to be fabulously rich. There were millions for all of them. They had lost it once—one of Graham's blasts opened a lateral seam that had them fooled for a while. But just as they were ready to give up and cash in on what they had, Cramer had found the main lode. There was no mistake about it now, though. The mine was gutted—empty. And they were rich for life!

That earlier camraderie had died out after they struck the claim. Gronfeld and Graham had hung together longest. They were a lot older than he and had different tastes. But of late their gruff monosyllables had grown harsher and shorter and their tempers testier. They seemed suspicious of each other. Neither one could go out without having the other trailing along, watching him like a hawk.

They checked and rechecked each gram of the rich ore with—what seemed to Cramer—childish exactness. As if in that huge fortune a gram or half a gram made any difference! They were dealing in millions—not tens and hundreds! After all, though, they were getting along in years and they'd led a pretty tough life. You had to make allowances.

He stopped at the mouth of the shaft to squirm out of his suit. Instinctively he turned to where the locker should be, then laughed aloud. No more of that! This was just a hole in the rock now. The suit went in the ship and, in a few minutes, they would be thundering across the desert to Lanak and the canals—and then home. Home! Ah! Earth would be good after six years in this barren hell!

HE STOOD looking out over the fantastic, tumbled badlands that reached away in red confusion to the horizon. Horizons were near on Mars, even in the great sea plains, and the clear air made them seem nearer. Without some kind of rocket-ship, no man could go into those eroded red wastes and live. None but a giant.

There had been giants in the first days of men on Mars—men who had gone out into the desert and lived and, after years had returned to die.

EDITOR'S NOTE

SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Forgotten Man of Space," by P. Schuyler Miller, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

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Cramer looked down at the little rabbit-men who sat up on their haunches as if they were waiting for something

They had made beasts of themselves—brutes living from hand to mouth, stalking the weird half-reptilian creatures that roamed to gorges, finding water in secret places and drinking blood when there was no water. It was a killing life, but they lived it.

Thanks to the rockets that was all over. Even the poorest desert-rat could afford a tiny ship with water tanks and storage for a pay-load. Down there at the foot of the slope was the hut. Beyond, around the spur, would be the ship, hot silver in the sun, waiting for him. Gronfeld must have found the 'scope by now—probably Graham had remembered and told him. They'd be impatient, waiting for him to get back. Then up and away into the black skies, and all the misery of those six long years would be gone and forgotten. Forgotten! As if a man could ever forget in the desert!

There was new life in his stride as he went up over the worn red rock of the hillside toward the place where the ship was. No need to go by way of the hut. Its rude walls of heaped talus were deserted and its smoke-hole gaped empty. He was done with that and all like it! Straight over the spur and down to the ship—that was the way. And then—home!

His wiry arms drew him up to the knife-edge of broken strata that edged the cliff. Anticipation was tingling like fire in his veins. It was great to stand here alone, high above everything, and then to look up into the black sky and let your eyes drop slowly down—down to the horizon—down to the red desert—down to the sculptured hills with their spidery gullies—down at last to the silvery ship nestling under the cliff! He closed his eyes. Up now, and open them to the hard sky, and now down—down—down—

The ship was gone!

* * * * *

Forgotten. Oh, but it was bitter! It was on old

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story in the desert—one partner too many when there was a rich pay lode—one who could be conveniently "forgotten" until it no longer mattered. No one could prove anything when the desert was done with him. There was no one to care.

He had the hut, and it was cold and empty, without fuel and without food. A few empty cans on the stone slab that had been their table, a shrinking stain of dirty water on the sanded floor—no more.

He had the mine, and it was empty, a rifled seam in the cliffside with its pale glow of wealth fading away. A cluttered heap of rock from the last blast, after the electroscope had showed that the lode had petered out, a dribble of black ore-dust on the floor of the tunnel where a can had leaked, thin echoes clattering along the walls—no more.

He had one feeble hope of life—no more.

There was no water at the mine. While they were scraping feverishly at the side of the hill, wondering what they had found, what the ship carried was enough. When black millions stared at them from the red rock they knew that it would be but a drop in the gallons they must have. They had to find water and they must have food.

They found water and food beyond the horizon—in the riddled, cavernous limestone that marks the buried streams and icecaves of the Martian desert. They found the sprawling brown vines and fat pods of that nameless plant that has preserved the lives of more men than history can ever know. And for three long Martian years—years twice as long as those of Earth—they had lived on water and Martian peas.

In an hour the ship had gone and returned with its tanks heavy with water. Half an hour to fill them—it meant at least a hundred earthly miles, doubled and trebled by the tortuous gorges that lay between. It meant ten days at the least.

Most of those days would be waterless and all of them would be without food.

There was water in the mine-shaft—a single can. They had forgotten that.

Slinging it over his back in a twist of dried vine, Cramer went down past the squat red hut into the red desert. The sun was slanting down from the zenith and the long shadows were creeping out from beneath the rocks.

CRAMER lay flat on his blistered face in the red sand close under the edge of an angular spur of sandstone. Ten suns had climbed ponderously to the zenith and wavered down. Ten cruel nights had frozen the blood in his veins as ten burning days had boiled it. Ten days he remembered, five of them made horrible by the thirst that was drying up his skin, shriveling his flesh, clogging his mouth and throat with his blackened tongue and plugging his nostrils with caustic dust. Five days fusing together, merging into a red warped blur of pain and heat and thirst, riddled with crazy visions, wracked with cruel memories—five days of hell.

Only fate knew how many more there had been.

It was day now. Cramer's mind was very clear—crystal-clear and keen. Everything stood out in his brain sharp and distinct and hard, as though he were feeling them with his fingers or with his swollen tongue. Every little nerve in all his body vibrated with pain and every muscle was withered by his thirst.

Thirst burned in him like a great never-ending fire licking up through his throat and mouth and nostrils into his brain. It was like a torrent of little ants, desert ants, sand-ants, swarming over his helpless body and tearing at it with venomed mandibles—a flood of many little units merging into one, yet all distinct. Every little pain in all his tortured body was a unit of the great red thrist-pain—every one distinct and clear in his brain. He could count them, if counting had not ceased to exist, if all meaning had not been swallowed up by the avid little pains that were part of the great pain that had become his body.

There was a picture in the back of his eyes, against the retinas. He could feel it there. It had lain there motionless, for as long as he could remember since his brain had become clear. He could not change it, for the muscles of his eyes were dry and paralyzed by the little pains.

It was a picture of cliffs. Red cliffs rising up out of a tumble of broken rock into the black sky. Pink cliffs, cooler and whiter than the crimson sand that lapped hungrily at their base. Gray cliffs, dusted over with red dust and permeated with red. Limestone cliffs laid down in unremembered centuries in the depths of an unremembered sea. Bodies of set-things, pulpy and white, showering down out of the cool green gloom and through the slow ages being pressed and twisted and broken into cliffs, high cliffs red with the red dust of sleeping iron—red marble cliffs cut into fantasy, hollowed with caves.

He examined the part of the picture that had to do with caves. They were peppered all over the face of the rock and crowded under its tilting time-eaten ledges. The cliff was rotten with them, big and little, black mottled against red, dark and cool and moist in the bright desert. They ran back and down into the rock and at the bottom there were slender rivers running in the dark, and long lakes arched over with shadows. In one of them stood dripping columns of sweet coolness—of ice—of life!

He knew the caves. He had come before, in the ship, with Gronfeld or with Graham. He knew the caves. There was life there—the flowing life that had been in his veins, that the sun and red desert had sucked out—in the blurred, waterless days before his brain had become clear, and he was lying here. There was water there. There was water!

In the desert there was death.

The hard, clear, bright picture in the back of his brain was blurring over with a sort of red-black veil, like clotting hot blood pouring down over his open eyes. The shadows of the caves were melting into the shadows of the cliffs. The cliffs were swimming in redness, melting into it, swirling fantastically in a vortex of swift, undulant motion. The desert and the cliffs and the cool caves of the cliffs and the hard black sky were all eddying into one, into a great red stain against his retinas, into a vast red madness in his brain—all swallowed up by the thirst—pain that had become a huge red Thing eating—eating—eating—

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The red swirl melted mercifully into darkness.

There were dreams in the darkness. Not sight-dreams—not red visions—but sound-dreams. Little sibilant shufflings in the sands. Little clickings on the rock. Little excited whisperings and breath-hissings. And then there were touch-dreams. Little gentle fingers pushing through the pain. Little swinging motions, short and hurried and breathless. And then coolness. And then no dreams.

Cramer woke to the cool vision of myriads of eyes. They were round eyes, big and phosphorescently green in the darkness. They had narrow pupils that pulsed and fluctuated as they stared at him, widening slits of black against milky yellow-green.

THE agony of thirst was fading. Moisture was in the air and in the cool stone on which he lay. Moisture was dripping musically on crystal, its sound singing in his ears. Moisture was trickling through his broken lips, over his swollen tongue, into his thirst-seared throat. Moisture was soaking into his parched skin and into the muscles under it, and into his hungering vitals. The eyes were giving him life.

He moved, painfully. The eyes receded and their pupils became fine lines, fear-lines. The trickle of moisture through his lips slobbered and stopped. Eagerly he ran his tongue over the stain of water on his chin. Pain made him draw it back. A thin whimper whispered in his throat, and from the darkness a whisper answered, like the mewing of kittens very far away. The eyes came closer.

Two of the eyes were just above him, very close. There was a grayness beyond the dark. Against it was the rounded silhouette behind the eyes—a small round head with great fan-like ears—a small, stout body—thin arms. There were hands and there was something in the hands. It approached him. The trickle of water began again and the other eyes came close to him, beside him. There were soft, deft touches of little fingers on his hot flesh. There was the caress of cool water. He raised his hand. His finger-tips touched fur, soft and warm, fur that flinched and then steadied. Sleek muscles moved under the fur. Blood pounded.

Cramer drifted into sleep.

Many times Cramer woke to the gray dark and the slow trickle of water on his burning body. Once he ate something soft and rather tasteless that woke a gnawing hunger in his vitals, but after a little that subsided into the dull throb of the thirst-pain that was being washed out of his soul. He slept again.

When he woke the clearness had come back into his brain. It was a soft clearness, like deep water, not hard and brilliant as it had been in the desert. He saw things gently and his body responded drowsily to what he saw. He moved his hand, and it stirred lazily, as through water, with a sort of voluptuous dull ache throbbing through it as the muscles contracted. He let it fall again and rolled his head toward the grayness.

The dark arched above him and the grayness was a soft blur against it. A thin column of water dropped down out of it to spatter on unseen ledges and spray his body with its delicious coolness. Far up where the gray began, as though at the end of a long shaft of pale mist, was a spot of bright white. There was a pink flush against it—a sort of glare reflected from some invisible source very far above. That white stain was digging into his memory. He closed his eyes and let his mind drift back in the blackness. Then suddenly he knew.

He was in the ice-caves.

He had been here before. The picture came to him—the great cave above, opening under the overhang of the cliff, its mouth always in shadow—the green-white ice welling out of the crannies of the rock, glistening with moisture, reflecting the flush of the desert—the little rivulet of clear water dropping into blackness. He had gone down, far down, on a rope of twisted vines. He had seen the ice as a pale white blink at the end of a shaft of gray and felt the mist wafting up from far below. But he had not found the bottom.

Now, as he opened his eyes again, it seemed to him that he could make out the shape of the cavern where he lay.

It was a great hollow dome, sheer-walled, cut away by eddying water. There were dark spots along the base of its walls—tunnels, leading down. One of them was gray. And the eyes had disappeared.

He rolled over on his face and drew his legs up under him, stiffening his arms. He rose on all fours, then tottered back on his knees, wavering dizzily. The nausea passed and he put out an exploring hand. There was a low rock quite close to him. With a heave he was on his feet.

The cavern was suddenly much smaller than he remembered it. The roof swooped at him and the walls rushed in. Only the shaft of grayness stretched endlessly up, unchanged. It was as though he had been a little flat thing of two eyes and a brain, whereas now he was a six-foot mass of flesh and bone, a man.

The idea started a little feathery tickling at the bottom of his brain. It was funny! He laughed a great roaring, echoing laugh that rocked thunderously about him.

ABRUPTLY there was a sudden wave of motion. The gray tunnel went flickeringly black. There was the click of tiny claws hurrying on stone. There were the kittenish mewings, alarmed and plaintive. There were the eyes again.

They swirled about him in the dark. There were shapes that he could not make out, moving swiftly. The narrow pupils were dilated—questioning. The hurrying forms pressed closed. Little hard hands pushed at his calves and knees. Clusters of paired eyes hovered about his thighs. Tottering precariously above them, he shuffled forward.

There was a large tunnel that twisted steeply upward, too tortuous for any light to filter through to the inner cavern. When they saw that he went willingly, the little creatures ceased their pushing and pattered ahead through the dark, leading the way. At a fork in the passage they crowded into the false path, staring silently up at him. Then light came suddenly around a hairpin bend in the tunnel and he saw them.

They were like rabbits. That was his first thought. They had small, blunt heads with huge round ears, and red-brown, furry bodies. Their

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hind legs were much like those of an earthly rabbit or squirrel, shaped for agility and speed, but their feet were like monkeys' feet and their fore-limbs were to all intents and purposes arms —human arms—with tiny furry hands and blunt nails. They had no tails.

If their hands were human, their faces were elfin. There were the great glowing eyes, slightly protruding, and there were stubby noses, soft and flat like rabbits' noses. Their mouths were round and pursed with square white teeth. They seemed to wear a perpetual grimace of whimsical amazement. A "whimace," Cramer called it, thinking smilingly of his "Alice in Wonderland" with its aptly coined words. The light-colored tufts of fur above the big round eyes helped to make their faces elfishly ridiculous. Cramer never forgot that first impression of scores of tiny furry fairies scuttling about on squattering legs, waving their furry hands in excited gesture.

He looked down. At the base of the cliff, crowded into the narrow band of shadow that lay between the sheer rock and the desert, were hundreds of the little creatures, staring expectantly up. Thy were waiting for something—for someone. He wondered if it were he.

Then he saw something that made him gape. The little beasts stood erect on their bent hind legs, like a rabbit or a squirrel on its haunches. That was a natural enough posture in animals of the type that they seemed to represent. But they were not animals!

Slung over their shoulders were little fiber bags, woven out of the tough bark of the vines that swarmed over the bottom of the cliff!

He stared down at those that surrounded him. They too had bags—were shouldering them from a pile in a nearby cave-mouth. Five of them came struggling out of the depths of a crevice, dragging something huge and unwieldy. Then and there Cramer lost his last doubts as to the intelligence of these creatures of the desert.

They had woven a bag for him!

He examined it closely before he followed them down the sheer face of the rock to where the main group waited. It was like burlap, though coarser, woven crudely out of twisted strands of bark. It was crammed with fat pods of the big brown Martian desert-pea that grew so profusely under the cliffs, and in a sort of insulating blanket of heavy leaves was a spongy fungus-growth, its fine pores saturated with water. Cramer realized that his long trek through the red desert had not ended.

The sun was low and they traveled in the shadows of the cliff until it merged with the red sands. Then strung out in a straggling caravan they headed out into the desert. From his place at the rear of the long line, Cramer watched their tiny rounded forms bobbing far ahead against the dunes. The moved with an elastic loping hop, very much like the rabbits they resembled, but with their sacks they seemed to him more like a caravan of gnomes, packing a fabulous treasure across a coral sea.

With night they came together into a compact group with Cramer at the center. They could see in the dark as well or better than in the glare of day, but they realized that he must be guided and chose their pace accordingly. When day came and the sun glared at them over the edge of the desert, they turned aside into a labyrinth of gorges where there were crannies and burrows and a shadowed shelter large enough for him.

They ate little and drank less. Cramer realized the necessity of that. Because of his stumbling presence the distance covered by their night-marches had been cut by more than half. They were on half-rations, yet they did not desert him or try to hurry him. These little beast-creatures showed more consideration than most men.

SIX days of travel brought them out of the desert into rock country again. Their water was almost gone, but more than half of the food remained. What did it mean? Why had they started on this tedious trek across the desert face of Mars? Why did they carry a burden so much greater than they needed? It puzzled him.

He could see that they were growing uneasy. They were behind schedule, and it seemed to make a difference—a big difference. He sensed impatience and a shade of regret growing in the big round eyes that stared up at him in the dark. And he resolved to do something about it.

At evening of the sixth day they were assembling in the lee of a crumbling bluff, waiting to take up the night's march. Cramer hauled himself out of the nook in which he had been sleeping and beckoned to his neighbor, a large male with a broad black line down his back.

With the little creature at his heels, he strode over to where the leader of the caravan was assembling his followers. Squatting in the sand before them, he pointed off in the direction in which they were going, then to the waiting throng. He moved aside, out of the line of march, taking his black-backed friend with him, and made an imperious gesture of dismissal. Then he waited.

He had to do it again before they realized what he meant. Then he saw understanding dawn on the little leader. A flurry of excited mewing ran over the crowd of watching creatures. The leader seemed to be conferring with those nearest him. Next two of the older males separated from the group and came over to where Cramer sat with the black-striped one. There was a piping whistle from the leader and the line got under way, loping over the loose sand at a speed at least twice as great as he could make. With his three guides, Cramer followed as fast as he could manage.

Three nights later they reached their goal. They had cut through a wilderness of rotted sandstone, its tortuous gorges heaped with sand and strewn with talus from the tottering crags that lined them. Cramer's sense of direction long since had been lost, but the three who guided him seemed to be certain of the way. About midnight they reached a sheer wall of red-ribbed white rock—the only white rock Cramer had seen on Mars. A dark line split it from top to bottom, a great fault in the planet's crust. A foot or less of space separated the sheer walls. Into it his little guides vanished. With a moment's hesitation he followed.

He had to sidle along like a crab, dragging his pack after him. He had to twist his feet around and fit them into crevices that threatened to seize them and hold them forever. He had to inch his way up fifty feet and more to where the

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crevice widened enough to let him through, or squirm along on his side through a mere rabbit-hole with three pairs of eyes peering anxiously out of the dark. Finally, lame and sore in every muscle, he reached the end, and tumbled headlong out on the ledge that ended the fault.

Ages ago a meteor had crashed into the center of a limestone butte, throwing up a shattered, weirdly broken wall of rock-wreckage and filling the bowl of the resultant crater with rock-dust finer than fine sand. The force of the impact had split the plateau along an old fault-line, opening the crevice which was its single exit to the outer world. Here in the hidden crater was the secret sanctuary of the little red-brown rabbit-men.

They were busy now—furiously busy. The floor of the crater swarmed with them, crouching close over the arid soil, scratching and prodding, shuffling queerly. Cramer could not see what they were doing, but they reminded him of a flock of hens pecking and scratching for grain.

His simile was poor. They were sowing, not reaping. A sort of insane frenzy seemed to have possessed every individual of the tribe. Piled in confusion against the walls of the crater were the dry stalks of a previous harvest. They looked queer—blighted. They had lost the sere red-brownness of the normal vines. A black dry-rot stained them, a powdery dust was eating them away. Many were contorted by huge knots and boles. Something had gone very wrong with that last harvest. It was that something that had sent the males of the tribe hundreds of miles across the arid face of Mars to find new seed. It was that something that had brought them to him and saved him from the terrible hunger of the red sands.

FROM the vantage-point of a cave-mouth, high on the wall of the crater, Cramer watched the planting. With their strong, nailed feet the males threw out the powdery rock-dust in long straight furrows. Behind them came their mates, strewing the seed with skillful hands. A sudden thrust of their stubby thumbs shot the peas from their pods—a double shuffle of agile feet covered them. At intervals of a few inches were buried large chunks of the porous water-holding fungus. Water was the greatest problem of the little half-human people—was, in fact, the greatest problem of any thinking race that would try to conquer the dying planet—but they seemed to have solved it in a way all their own.

Cramer learned more of that fantastic, frenzied ceremony of planting in the years that followed—ten long Martian years in which he came more and more to be one of the desert folk—the Maee, as his rude tongue translated their mewing call. They had a language of a few simple words, supplemented by signs and shrill expletive cries and whistles—emotion-sounds. They had a rude social order with a chief-leader and a nobility of the older and wiser males. In a sense they were monogamists, although with each recurring spring there was a mating ceremony in which many of the younger creatures took new mates and discarded old ones. Few of the older members of the tribe participated, squatting in their dark cave-mouths beside the mates they had chosen for life and staring owlishly down at the weaving, darting shadows on the crater floor.

They had no fire—no tools—and so far as Cramer could discover, no religion or superstition. They were animal, and yet they were not animals. They twisted bark into cord and wove it into bags, but they knew nothing of cloth and wore no clothes or adorments. They planted the desert peas and, in the long dry fall, reaped their harvest, but there was no use of plow or spade. Their sole implements were their feet and their clever hands.

The peas were the only food they had. Each harvest was heaped high in the dry, cool cave they had allotted to Cramer. Here they came when they were hungry and took what they needed. Cramer could never discover their system of rationing, yet system there must have been. As if by instinct each creature took what was proper and no more. In the beginning Cramer had thought to make their life easier by applying his human intelligence to the apportionment of the food under his care. There was never any need for that intelligence.

They lived to eat and they ate to live. So it seemed to Cramer. Whatever pleasures they might have, besides the annual ceremony of mating, meant nothing to him. Their psychology was not his. Superficially he became one of them, sharing in their simple work and feeding from the common store, but never in all the years he was with them did he really see into their minds. He was never really sure that there were minds for him to see.

Always he returned to the puzzle of the planting. He learned other facts, saw other things that helped a little to interpret the meanings that he could not see, but the real problem never changed. It was not a question of water. He had soon realized that. In some of the deeper caverns there were springs with water enough to keep them alive but none to spare. Once a year, over a range of about ten days, the underground sources were replenished by the melting polar ice, thousands of miles away. In those ten days they must plant—must sow their seed with its accompanying sponges of water. What moisture it gave was enough to sprout the peas.

With uncanny speed the young plants thrust their rootlets deep into the powdery soil, far down to the buried watercourses. By the time the fungi had rotted away and given up the last of their absorbed moisture, the desert-bred peas had reached a supply of their own. By that time, too, a second planting had become impossible. There was no longer water to spare for it.

That explained much—the impatience of the little creatures as time passed, when their straggling caravan was still far from home, the extra seed that they had carried, the importance of the planting ceremony to their simple lives. It did not explain why they had trekked hundreds of miles across a waterless desert for that seed. It did not explain how they had come to find him.

As the barren seasons rolled past, Cramer lost all count of time. He was a machine—an automaton—feeding, watching, dully wondering. He saw that that first harvest was incredibly rich. The stout brown vines were covered with swollen, heavy pods. The thick leaves grew huge and had a metallic sheen. The ordinarily minute blossoms grew into gigantic purple blooms that flooded the crater and the caves with a cloying,

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suffocating perfume. At harvesting Cramer had to find another cave. The granary in which he had been living was filled to overflowing.

THE second year the purple flowers were smaller and their perfume less powerful. Some of the vines died and on others the leaflets were stunted and withered. Most of the peas were still enormously larger than any Cramer had ever seen, but there were a few, commonest near the center of the crater where the land was lowest, in which the pods were small and many of the peas shriveled and were dwarfed.

Year by year he watched the blight spread and the harvest dwindle. There was still food enough for the little colony, for those rich, early harvests supplied food for more than two years as well as seed for the planting. But there would not be enough for long. All of the peas were dwarfed now, and most of them were black and glossy as the leaves had been. Then in the fifth year a black stain appeared on the vines nearest the center of the crater and spread swiftly.

A powdery black dust consumed leaves and stalks and withered the roots. The peas were small and hard and black, with a bitter metallic taste. They would not sprout. That year, when the floods came and the water rose in the deepest caverns, half the tribe gathered for the trek across the desert in search of new seed. Cramer went with them.

When there was water enough to saturate their sponges, they went. Cramer's eyes had long since adapted themselves to the life of darkness that he led and there was no delay because of him. In three days they covered the distance to the water-caves where they had found him ten earthly years before. For a single day they rested, filling their sacks with seed and replenishing their water. In three more days they were back at the crater. The water had subsided, but the females and young had stored away great quantities of the spongy fungus, saturated with water, in readiness for the planting. It was cool in the lower caves, but the water evaporated rapidly into the thin air. The year when he had come the caravan had returned barely in time. Another day or two and there would not have been enough water. That year many would have died.

The Martian years! On Earth that time would be almost doubled. Cramer's name had long since been forgotten in the home-world that he had loved. Among the Maee he was taken for granted—was almost one of their own kind. Then for a second time he went with the seed-seekers.

They came up out of the desert to the long, low line of red cliffs, pale rose in the starlight. A great wave of heartsickness rose in Cramer's throat as he stood there under the towering wall of rock, staring out across the sands to that horizon which hid the hillside where he had been "forgotten." Above him a great star glowed softly white among the steel points of the constellations—Earth—his home.

Crouched there at the mouth of his cave, the horizon lightening with the sunrise, he remembered Earth and men.

The Maee were weirdly manlike, but they were not men. Every day he discovered new humanity with them, but he could not forget the animal beneath. He longed for the heave of sullen seas against granite cliffs with the wind swirling in his ears and the scent of the pines in his nostrils. He longed for the lingering, fading tints of evening and the slow flush of dawn. He longed for the beauty of the moon, cheese-white against a bowl of cobalt, diamond-studded. He longed for blue days when the sky-lanes were strewn with cloud-castles and for the softness of a night in which the stars were not hard, bright, watching eyes. But most of all, he longed for men.

The Maee had a language, but he could not speak it or understand. They had a life of their own, a society, but he was alien to it. In the long red days when the Maee slept and the sun shimmered over the brown vines, he would sit and stare into emptiness, dreaming of the sound of a human voice, longing for human friendship, hungering for all the complex trivalities that go to make up human life. Men were somewhere there beyond the sands and the contorted crags. He was a man! But men never came.

He turned away from the sudden glare of the sunrise and went into the cave. Ice glimmered in the gloom. He went toward it, touched it. It was cool and soothing to his feverish skin. He could close his eyes and remember the coolness of Earth—cool moss under the green arch of the forest—cool shadows across the hillsides—cool streams among majestic peaks—cool flight in the spangled darkness above the clouds. He could still remember. It was all he had now.

He let his fingers trail along the smooth surface of the ice. A little thrill ran up from them through his arms, knotting the muscles. He stiffened. He felt the sharp edge of a fresh cut in the ice.

Men had been here!

BY DAYLIGHT it was plain. Men had come often, had come recently. They would come again. Or—would they?

All through the day he sat thinking. It was hard to think now, after all the years. He was old now. And there was no answer. The Maee could not help him—could not understand. He could stay, hoping against hope that men would come, living each endless day twice over, lying sleepless through the interminable night, wasting slowly away. He could go with them, and never know. In the end he decided to go.

But he must be sure! He must not let them come and go without him! There must be a way! Laboriously, wakening the long-buried memories of a discarded life, he scratched his message in the thin sand that formed the floor of the cave. Then he went with the Maee.

They came! Day after day he clambered to the top of the cliff to watch, and one day they came! They were a steel-bright speck over the desert, glittering against the sky. They were an oval gem, tailed with fire. They were a smooth-flanked craft of steel, hurtling through the skies. They checked the vessel settled slowly to the plateau. The side of the little ship swung open.

Men came!

There were two, young prospectors as he had been. He was lean and dry and old, a withered skeleton with a grizzled beard. His voice was strange, even in his own ears. He had not heard

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it for very long. He saw them smiling, nudging each other as he babbled out his crazy, jumbled mass of words—all that had happened—all that he had seen—all that he had learned of the Maee—everything—anything—anything so long as it was speech, so long as they would listen. The old man was cracked—he knew—but they were men. They were men! Tears were in his old eyes after twenty earthly years.

They gave him men's food and men's drink—canned meat and cold coffee out of cans—but it was better than the tasteless peas and the metallic, glowing water of the Maee. They put clothes on him and listened when he told them about the crater and the caves and the planting. They asked questions—polite, kind questions. They were being kind—kind to a cracked old man—kind because they were men—his breed—men! After twenty years, there were other men!

He listened to what they told him, eagerly, hungrily. They told him about Earth—about wars—Europe all one nation—the yellow peoples growing strong and bold—they told him about Mars of the canals—Lanak—civilization—new laws and new governments, and the new ways they had of mining, getting every last milligram out of the rock. "Soaking up the glow" they called it.

He showed them the crater and the caves and the Maee. The Maee were strange—timid. They squatted in the cave-mouths, watching. Their eyes shone out of the deep darkness. They moved away when he approached even the old

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black-backed one—even his old friend. They were strange. But it didn't matter! He didn't care!

He showed them the things that he knew—the granary—the water-caves. He gave them food, peas from the granary—all they wanted. They filled their ship with food and took water, plenty of water from the caves.

They were interested in caves, especially in those that ran back under the crater. He was glad. He showed them all he knew—the place where the fungus grew and the tunnels beyond where there was light—caves too small for any but the Maee to enter. He had wanted to go in and explore, many years ago when he was still young. The tunnels widened beyond. But he was too big. These were men—clever, intelligent men! Eagerly he watched them drill and set their explosives. The Maee watched too, from the dark—myriads of round eyes watching from the dark. He ran with the other men when it was time, but the Maee did not run. They sat and watched from the dark till the glare came, and the noise.

The black-striped one was killed. Others died too—others he had known for a very long time. The gases got some of them, and then there was the concussion and the falling rock. The fungus-beds were buried by the rock that fell. But the men took the dead Maee away to their little ship and came back with torches and instruments to explore the caves beneath the crater.

He did not go. Somehow, he did not want to go where the Maee had died. The years had made him different from other men, more like the beasts, like the Maee. He saw different things and thought differently. But they went, trampling over the fallen rock, and when they returned there was a queer hard luster in their eyes.

THEY were men. They took him with them—away from the crater and the caves—home! The Maee watched them go, silently, from the cave-mouths. Myriads of green eyes glowing in the dark. He lay far back in the tail of the little ship, near the rockets, among the great piles of pods. The men were talking, whispering together, up forward in the control-cubby. He lay and listened to their voices. A half glow of contentment enveloped him. He was a man again!

The big man was talking now. The big man was Barron and the young one was Galt. Barron had a harsh voice, slurred and coarse. It was like Graham's voice, years ago. Cramer didn't like it.

"It's lousy with the stuff!" Barron grated.

"Yeah," Galt agreed to everything Barron said.

"The's metals too—platinum and that. I made tests. It was the big meteor brought em' in."

"Think you can get it?" Galt sounded a little skeptical.

"Sure!" Barron didn't like being doubted. "You seen the scope. Kicked clean off the scale, didn't it? You seen the little chunk from the blast—big as a house and just a little piece at that."

Gal's young voice was awed—sort of reverent.

"Gosh!" he murmured. "It's like heaven, findin' it like that! Like a dream. Millions for the both of us, and then Lanak and the canals and home. Earth!"

Barron was talking on—details—practicality. He was no milksop, "dreamin' about home!" "We can blast down through from the top, right in the middle where it's lowest. We'll save time that way, and there's no chance of shiftin' the water. We got water there, and food, just for the takin', and we don't want to lose it. By jinks, kid, we got it soft! Millions for the both of us!"

Galt's voice sounded a little dubious. "What food do you mean? Won't blasting like that kill the peas?"

The big man roared with laughter. "Peas! Who wants the lousy driedup swill? We got meat, kid—just for th' takin'! Rabbits. Thousands of 'em. Fill up that big crack with a couple good blasts and they're there till we're done with th' place. We'll eat meat, kid."

Galt peered back over his shoulder. The old man was lying still—sleeping maybe. Crazy old duffer! Living half his life over millions and never knowing it. Gibbering about rabbits like they were men, and about peas.

"What about the old fellow?" Galt asked.

Barron leered knowingly. "Him? The's nobody knows about him but us and nobody that cares a cuss. We can forget him."

Forget!

Both men turned at the sound. The old man was trying to stand up. The acceleration pushed him back. He hunched forward on his knees. He was by the fuel-chambers, where the outlets bulged into the ship. He was laughing—crazy, screaming laughter.

Ah! He was opening the air valves!

* * * * *

Over the red desert a bright speck blossomed into a great white puff of flame. After a little a sound came, thin and very far away, like the bursting of a rock.

A plume of fire streaked slowly down across the sky and vanished into the upflung chaos of the bad-lands. A fountain of light shot up where it fell, bright with specks of burning metal. Another sound came, deeper, the thin echo of a mighty roar.

The Maee were watching from the crack in the plateau that was the only entrance to their secret haven. In the dark their eyes were great and round—myriads of green eyes, watching from the dark. Somehow they understood what he who had lived among them had done for them.

NEXT ISSUE'S HALL OF FAME SELECTION

TWELVE HOURS TO LIVE

By JACK WILLIAMSON

AN OUTSTANDING SCIENTIFICTION CLASSIC

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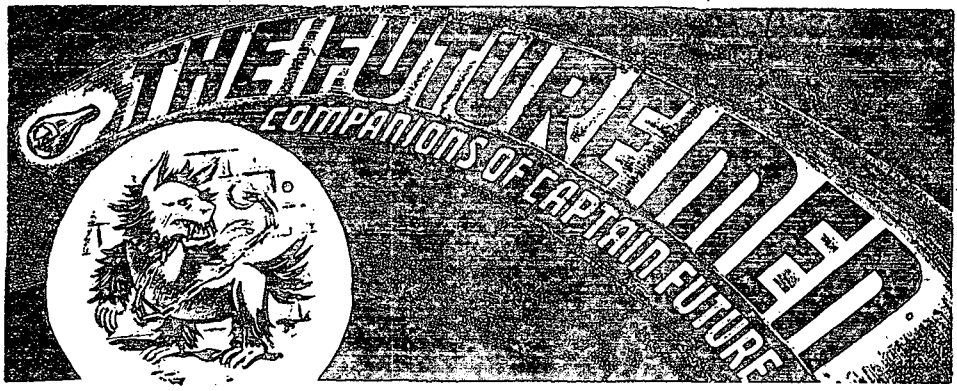

GRAG'S PET, THE MOON-PUP

Captain Future is averse to adopting the fierce, untamed creature—until Grag's faith in it is fully justified!

WILD and forbidding in the harsh glare of unsoftened sunlight, stretched the lifeless surface of the Moon. This savage landscape was without vegetation, water or air. It was a rumpled expanse of giant mountain ranges, cruel craters, and vast rock plains seamed by deep, narrow canyons.

At the shadowy bottom of one of those canyons, Captain Future, Otho and the Brain were intent on the task of unearthing a mass of gleaming metal ore. Curt Newton and the android wore their spacesuits. The Brain, who needed no such protection, hovered beside them.

Curt finally dislodged the mass of ore, and then straightened, leaning on his steelite bar. He looked down the canyon.

"Where did Grag wander off to?" he demanded.

"Depend on that crazy robot to stray away when there's heavy work to do," complained Otho.

A Moon-hound Pack

They started down the canyon in search of Grag. Then, as they squeezed through a narrow part of the chasm, they saw a giant figure approaching them. It was the massive, metal robot.

Grag held a small gray animal that was struggling and squirming in his grasp. It was a moon-pup, a young individual of the fierce moon-hounds that are the Moon's strange, non-breathing species of life.

"Look, I picked up a maverick moon-pup!" Grag exclaimed. "I'm going to tame it and make a pet of it."

Captain Future interrupted sharply. "Where there's one of those creatures, there's more of them! We'd better get out of—*listen!*"

There was no sound, of course, outside the short-range telaudio instruments by which they conversed. But Curt Newton had felt a faint vibration, a rushing murmur, from the rock beneath his feet.

"Moon-hounds—a pack!" yelled Otho. "Look there!"

Impenetrable Creatures

Down the canyon toward them was coming a raging horde of gray, terrible beasts—wolflike quadrupeds with enormous fangs and talons. Their small eyes glared red as they charged.

Moon-hounds could not be harmed by ordinary weapons. Their flesh was siliceous, its curious bodily metabolism maintained by their use of raw rock and metal elements as food. Atom-guns would not hurt them.

"Back up the canyon, quick!" yelled Curt. "If those beasts get us down, we're done for!"

Curt and the three Futuremen rapidly retreated along the chasm, firing a volley of brilliant atomic bolts to discourage their pursuers. But the moon-hounds, finding that the bolts of force did not harm them, rushed forward boldly.

Curt and his comrades squeezed back through the narrow part of the chasm. As they did so, Captain Future delayed a second to thrust something into a niche of the cliff. Then he darted hastily on.

Captured Pup

Next moment, a soundless explosion rocked the chasm around them. Its force tore away great masses of shattered rock that crashed down from the precipitous sides and completely blocked the narrow chasm. The block formed an impassible barrier between the moon-hounds and the Futuremen.

MEET THE FUTUREMEN!

In this department, which will be a regular feature whenever a Captain Future Novel is used in this magazine, we acquaint you further with the companions of Curt Newton whom you have met in our complete book-length novel. Here you are told the off-the-record stories of their lives and anecdotes plucked from their careers. Follow this department closely, for it contains many interesting and fascinating facts to supplement those you read in the featured novels.

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"That was too blamed close," panted Curt Newton. "If I hadn't brought along a couple of atomic blasting-cartridges to help us dig the ore, the pack would have been on our necks."

"And it was all Grag's fault, for picking up that miserable moon-pup," accused Otho.

"You'd better leave the little beast here, Grag," advised Captain Future. "You can't make a pet of it. Nobody's ever tamed a moon-hound yet."

"I'll tame this one," Grag insisted. "It likes me already. You can see that."

Never Been Tamed

The little gray moon-pup, squirming frantically in his grasp, chose that moment to get his head free. The animal instantly tried to sink its powerful, jewel-hard teeth into Grag's metal arm, actually scarring the steelite.

"Yes, we can see how much it likes you," jeered Otho. "Its affection is positively touching."

"It will learn better," Grag affirmed. "Let me keep it, chief. I always wanted a pet."

Curt Newton understood. Grag, mighty man of metal, knew himself to be irrevocably different from ordinary humanity. That knowledge had nursed a certain inferiority complex in the mind of the intelligent robot. He felt a dim apprehension that ordinary human people looked down on him because of his difference from them.

Grag craved to be looked up to, by somebody or something. That was why the robot so eagerly wanted this moon-pup as a pet. Curt understood this, and so against his better judgment he gave a conditional permission.

"All right, Grag, you can keep it, though I don't believe you'll ever tame it," he answered. "But if it starts making any trouble for us, it'll have to go."

Strange Metabolism

When they returned to the moon-laboratory, Grag secured the moon-pup to the wall by means of a light steelite collar and chain.

The little gray animal was only two feet long. Its squat body was supported by four short legs whose paws ended in powerful, chisel-like digging-talons. Below its sharp little snout, were jaws set with equally powerful grinder-teeth. Its small black eyes were bright with hostility as it faced the Futuremen.

Curt Newton inspected it with considerable interest. He had never been able to make so close an examination of an individual of the moon-hound species, one of the strangest forms of life in the System.

Once, long ago, the Moon had had an atmosphere and many forms of life had flourished on it. Then as the satellite slowly lost its air by molecular dispersion, most of its life had perished. But a few species had managed to adapt themselves even to the airless conditions.

The moon-hounds were such a species. They needed no air because they did not breathe. Their bodies were of strange inorganic flesh, in which silicon replaced carbon as the basic element. They ingested the elements they required to replenish their tissues, directly from the raw rock and ore they dug out and pulverized in their grinding teeth. This weird metabolism of their bodies was aided by photosynthetic processes.

A Metal Jag

"I'm going to call it Eek," Grag announced. He extended his hand coaxingly to the moon-pup. "Here, Eek!"

Eek, the moon-pup, responded by showing his teeth menacingly at the outstretched hand.

"It can't hear you, Grag," Captain Future said. "Moon-hounds have no auditory or vocal organs, since sound is impossible on the Moon."

"I'll tame it, anyway," Grag insisted. "First, I'll give it something to eat."

He brought some bits of metal-bearing rock and proffered them to Eek. The moon-pup, watching them suspiciously with its beady little eyes, champed the rock to dust between its teeth and swallowed it.

Grag tried it with a scrap of pure copper. Eek devoured that with amazing speed. He brought it more copper, which was greedily bolted.

"Copper and other pure metals, to them, must be like candy to a human being," Curt commented.

"You've given it too much—it's sick," Simon Wright told Grag.

Eek had begun to wobble on his legs. His head swayed to and fro and a glazed look came into his eyes.

"Sick, nothing—the little pest is drunk," Otho said disgustedly.

Captain Future broke into a shout of laughter. "Otho's right. So much pure copper stimulated its metabolism too fast."

Eek was staggering. The little moon-pup tried to take a step and fell down on his face. He stumbled up again and stood, his head wagging foolishly.

"Boy, has he got a bender on!" exclaimed Otho.

Eek Understands

Grag was dismayed. "It's not his fault," he defended. "I just gave him too much at one time. I'll cut down on his food."

Two days later, the Futuremen returned to the moon-laboratory to find that Grag's cut in the moon-pup's rations had had its sequel.

Eek had, in their absence, eaten up his own steelite chain, had then devoured all the copper parts of one of Otho's best atom-pistols, and was now staggering around the room in a high state of intoxication.

Otho stormed that the moon-pup had to go at once. But Grag insisted that he would soon be able to tame and train the creature.

The next day, Grag's bellowing shout brought Curt and the other two Futuremen on the run from the underground hangar in which they were at work refitting the Comet.

"What's wrong?" Curt demanded sharply of the robot as they burst into the moon-laboratory.

"It's Eek," said Grag, proudly. "I've learned how to talk to him."

"You're dreaming!" scoffed Otho. "How can you talk to a beast that can't possibly hear a sound?"

"I talk to him telepathically," Grag declared. "He can hear my thoughts. I've made friends with him that way. Watch, and I'll tell him to come here to me."

Eek was chewing on a bit of rock in a far part of the room. Grag stared silently at the moon-pup. In a moment, Eek turned his head. Then he came trotting over to Grag and looked up inquiringly.

(Continued on page 83)

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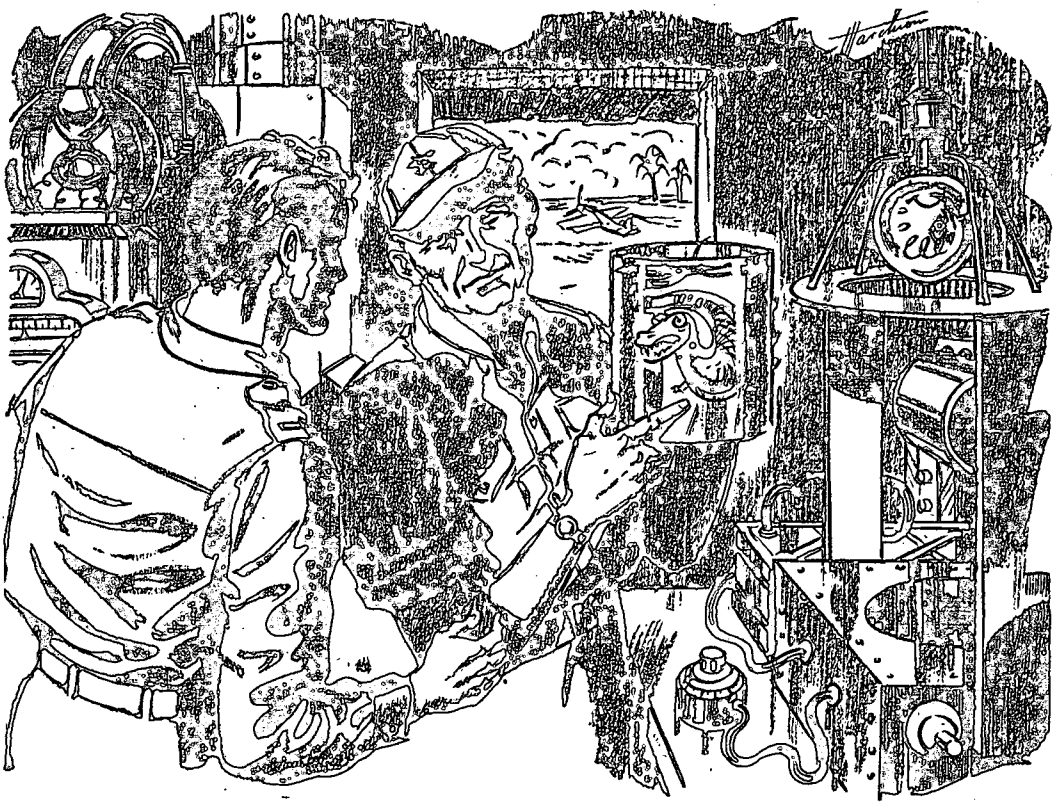

"Think what a triumph this lizard is, dead or alive," said Dupleix

The Jimson Island Giant

By SAM MERWIN, Jr.

Dupleix had a formula for reducing living matter—but he had no crystal ball in which to foresee the consequences!

DUPLEIX, wearing shorts, shoes and an old red baseball cap, was waiting on the beach with his two native helpers as Gary Williams brought the amphibian up onto the hard-packed sand of Jimson Island. The resident meteorologist waved Gary a greeting while the pilot swung the plane around into position for unloading its cargo of supplies.

Once every fourteen days, weather permitting, Gary, a lieutenant in the Air Transport Command, brought mail, canned goods, frozen foods and reading material to Jimson Island. Earnest Dupleix, an ATC meteorologist captain, ruled there in solitary state with two dark-skinned helpers and their families.

Back in 1942, Jimson Island had been in the thick of things—one of the ever-thinning chain of islands held by the United States between the fearsomely advancing Japs and the ocean lanes to Australia and New Zealand. At that time it had been garrisoned by two full companies of anti-aircraft Coast Artillerymen, and the weather station had been of vital concern to hard-pressed convoys.

Now the Pacific battle front had moved thousands of miles beyond the hard-pressed lines of three years ago. No Japs had been reported near Jimson Island, either in planes or submarines, for many months. The Coast Artillerymen were long gone, and the single landing strip on the tiny speck of sand was grass-grown and threatened with jungle encroachment.

"Boy, this is really the hot spot of the earth!" exclaimed Gary Williams, fanning

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his sweating brow with his flier's helmet. The natives had received their orders and set about unloading the cargo.

"It averages one-o-two Fahrenheit the year round," said Dupleix, unwrapping a thick bundle of scientific magazines. He scanned them through squinted eyes in the brilliant sunlight. "Come on up to the shack for something cool."

"You're on—if I don't melt before I get there," said Williams.

They walked through the sweltering heat to the two-room shack and weather station atop the island's only rise of ground a quarter of a mile away.

Over a tall glass of cola and rum, the transport flier examined his host. He had long wondered how Dupleix managed to take it, alone here in the midst of a blistering nowhere, with nothing but native company—and darn little of that—to occupy his time.

The meteorologist was burned almost as dark as his *café au lait* aides. He was thinner than Williams remembered him, but he looked in magnificent health. Tight little lines etched around the corners of his eyes and mouth, however, testified to the strain imposed on him by loneliness.

"Don't you ever yearn to look at a bright light once in awhile?" the flier asked him. "You must have plenty of leave coming your way."

"I don't believe so," said Dupleix thoughtfully. "No, if I go back to the States, I'm just another crack-pot scientist. Out here"—he made a sweeping gesture to include the island steaming beyond the hermetically sealed windows of the air-conditioned shack—"I'm an absolute ruler. It may not be much of an empire, but it's mine."

"You sound a trifle on the paranoic side today."

"Perhaps I am," said his host. He permitted himself the shadow of a grin. "By the way, Gary, thanks for getting in on time with these magazines. They ought to be just what I need to complete an experiment I'm working on."

"You weather men," moaned Williams, shaking his head somberly. "I suppose you've figured out something that will predict it accurately all over the world."

"Hardly," said Dupleix, with utter gravity. "To do that, I'd have to be stationed either at the North or South Pole. Anyway I'm only a duration meteorologist. Before that, I was a cyclotron expert."

"Ho, ho. So you bashed atoms around."

"We tried to," said Dupleix. "But I'm not sure we weren't on the wrong track. I've been making some experiments here. Would you care to look them over?"

"Why not?" said the flier. "I've got a half hour until those boys of yours get the old ship unpacked. Lead on, McDuff."

THEN you feel certain you can vary people's size by giving them this atomic bath?" asked Williams. He was beginning to wonder which of them was really crazy.

"You have seen these lizards," said the scientist. He fondled an ugly little creature that lay motionless in the alcohol-filled jar in his hand. "It was twelve inches long before I gave it a bath. Now it measures four inches from tail to nose."

"But it's dead," said Williams. He eyed the complicated arrangement of coils, batteries and generators by which Dupleix had filled two large containers with what he called his cosmic reduction agent.

"That's because I gave it to him too slowly," said Dupleix. "I have come to the conclusion that only by shock methods can life be retained in the subjects of my experiments. But think what a triumph this lizard is, dead or alive."

"Ugly sort of triumph," said Williams, shuddering. He had the average American's dislike for reptiles. Dupleix gave him a disdainful glance, led the way from the laboratory back to the living room.

"Stop and think of what it means," said the scientist, following. "Suppose I were to reduce the size of every living thing, animal and vegetable, on Jimson Island. I wouldn't have to worry about Akano—that's my number-one boy—getting surly when he gets fed up with his life. I could tell him what to do or step on him. I'd really be a superman."

"You seem to forget that we're having a lot of trouble with supermen as it is," said the flier drily. "How would you go about it?"

"I haven't quite figured it out," said Dupleix, and changed the subject. A few moments later, they walked out into the heat to return to the plane on the beach.

"Could you spare me a few gallons of gas, Gary?" the scientist asked the flier as they neared their destination.

"Sure—I guess so," said Williams. "What for?"

"Remember that Piper Cub the boys cracked up last year?"

Williams nodded.

"Well, I've patched her up. I used to have a license to fly those little grasshoppers before the war. And I could get a better line on what sort of weather is coming up, maybe spray a few of the insects that seem to be infesting Jimson of late."

"Okay, but be careful. You don't want to crack up yourself out here. I won't be back for a couple of weeks."

"You're an officer and a gentleman," said Dupleix. His eyes gleamed oddly as he spoke.

"How about weather ahead?" the flier asked him when he had siphoned off twenty-five gallons of high octane. The scientist shrugged.

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"There's nothing special brewing this time of year. You can fly in with your eyes shut."

"Save your reducing efforts for the gals back home," said Williams. He waved a salute, climbed into the cockpit and pressed the plane starter.

It was not until he had taken off that he began to put things together and he stirred uneasily on the cushion. Reducing agent, dead lizard, paranoia, the repaired cub, the borrowed fuel, crop dusting—they added up to a disturbing pattern. Dupleix must have gone out of his head from loneliness.

For a moment, Williams was tempted to turn back. But if he did, he wouldn't have enough fuel to complete his hop—and he was due at his next port of call in two hours. He swore softly, flew on.

Half an hour later, he was in the midst of a hurricane—a hurricane Dupleix should have had ample warning of. As he felt the plane buck and spin toward the water, he cursed the meteorologist for letting crack-pot experiments keep him from his duty.

IT WAS five days later that a rescuing Dumbo spotted his raft and hauled him out of the drink. By that time, Williams was unconscious, suffering from the raging fever of overexposure. He was flown to a base hospital, where it took him two more weeks to recover. Not until a month later was he back on the job, ready for duty.

"Pardon me, sir," he asked his commanding officer, "but have the regular reports been coming in from Captain Dupleix on Jimson Island?"

"Glad you mentioned it, Williams," said the commandant. "I've been worried about Dupleix. We only heard from him once after you took off, and that was three weeks ago."

"You mean no one has gone out there?" said Williams, aghast.

"Sorry, Williams, but this push on Japan herself has tied up the whole ocean, even this far back. Dupleix had plenty of reserve supplies. He's stuck it out there for more than two years now without putting in for leave."

So Williams told his chief the whole story—as far as he knew it. At its conclusion, the commandant rose from his desk.

"Feel up to taking a short flight?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!" said the flier.

"I'm coming with you," said the superior officer. "Things have eased off a bit now, and I can get back here tomorrow. This has got to be investigated pronto."

"Let's go, sir," said Williams.

They flew out over the empty Pacific, gleaming like burnished metal beneath the wings of their plane in the sun. And when they were due to come in sight of Jimson Island, Williams scanned the water anxiously.

"What's that?" his chief asked, nodding toward a bare sand key off their port bow.

"Darned if I know," said Williams. Then, as something familiar about its shape clicked in his memory. "It looks like—but it can't be!"

"Something down there looks like a wrecked plane," said the commandant, who was peering through field glasses. A moment later, Williams spotted it, and they taxied in.

"Storm must have hit here mighty hard," said the commandant, scanning the treeless island as Williams cut the motors.

"We hope," said the flier, preparing to climb out.

They stood on what had been the grass-matted landing strip. It was fissured with great cracks, as if its surface had contracted like curdled milk pudding. In one of the cracks, the landing gear of a small plane had become wedged. The rest of the ship was an utter wreck.

"Queer," said Gary Williams. He shuddered. Wandering to what had been the rim of the strip, he picked up a gnarled, dead bush, perhaps eight inches high. It had a single, curiously solid wooden trunk, and its branches and roots were small for a shrub.

It looked—like a tree.

As they walked toward the shack on the little hill, they found hundreds more of the bushes, scattered at relatively great distances from one another. And when they approached the shack itself, they saw that it was a caved-in ruin. The walls seemed to have tottered without cause.

"The vegetation grew right up against it," said Williams. "Perhaps it worked its way underneath. If it contracted . . ."

"If—" said the commandant, clamping his lips hard together. "Look!"

In its collapse, the walls of the shack had fallen inward, making any entry without the aid of a bulldozer impossible. Lying on part of the ruin were the bones of a man, picked clean by the birds and whitened by the sun. A few shreds of cloth hung from the eery bleached framework. On one skeletal wrist was a tarnished silver dog tag. The commandant looked at it.

"Dupleix," he said. "The poor devil must have starved to death. Talk about your Midas touch. He made his world too small."

"What do you know!" said Williams, passing a troubled hand over his forehead to wipe sweat from his eyes. "I wonder what happened to the natives."

"Looking at what the birds did to Dupleix," said the commandant. "I wonder."

The men looked at each other briefly, then began to walk rapidly back toward their plane.

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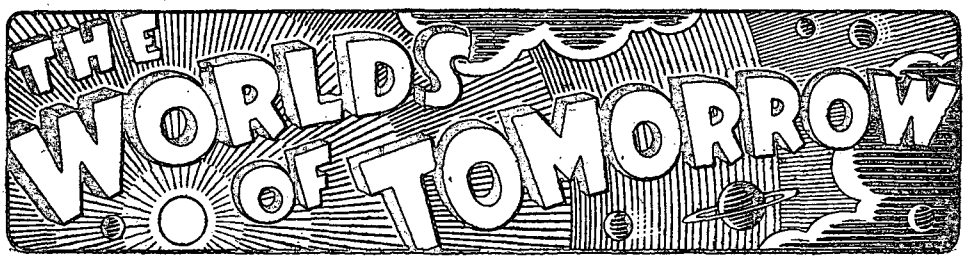

VULCAN, THE HOLLOW WORLD

Home of the Screaming-trees and the Sun Dogs, this satellite is one of the strangest—and most fantastic—of all spheres!

VULCAN, the little solar satellite that clings close to the blazing Sun, is in many respects one of the most fantastic worlds in the Solar System.

For a long time, nothing was known about this little celestial body except the mere fact of its existence. But thanks to the recent dangerous expedition of the Futuremen, which has been narrated in another place, we now know a great deal about Vulcan.

The greatest discovery has been the fact that Vulcan is a hollow world. This little solar satellite, instead of being solid like almost all the other bodies of the System, is in fact a very thick rock shell whose hollow interior is a new and fascinating kind of world.

The reasons for this queer formation have been exhaustively debated by interplanetary scientists since the Futuremen brought back the data. They have already formed a tentative theory to account for the phenomenon.

Closest to Sun

Vulcan, like all the other planets, asteroids and satellites of the Solar System, was undoubtedly brought into being ages ago by the approach of another star to our own Sun. That mutual attraction of two great stars set up tidal forces in our Sun which caused it to throw off a vast mass of scattered, molten matter. And this molten matter gathered into some scores of separate masses which, pulled out into space by the passing stranger sun where they cooled and hardened, formed the planets and moons of our System.

Vulcan was formed as the mass of matter closest of all to the Sun. And this had a deep effect upon the form taken by the newly-created satellite. The proximity of the unthinkably powerful gravitation of the Sun tended to counteract the gravitational control of Vulcan over its own constituent matter. Thus, instead of forming in a solid sphere around its center of gravity as other planets did, Vulcan formed into a thick, hollow shell of rock.

The outer surface of Vulcan never has completely cooled, to this day. It has remained molten because of the terrific radiance of the nearby Sun. But the inner parts of the shell slowly solidified and cooled.

As this happened, from the cooling rocks of the inner surface there poured great quantities of occluded gases. These furnished the interior of the satellite with an atmosphere, and with a hydrosphere which in time condensed into small rivers and lakes.

It is believed that the pressure of this atmosphere upon a certain fault in the rock shell, forced open the pit-shaft that is the only opening through the shell. Planetary geologists have calculated that the vast quantities of steam and gaseous vapors poured into the confined interior by the cooling rocks could have torn this opening through the shell.

The Beam

The existence of this pitway or opening is what gives day and night to the hollow world. When the side of Vulcan in which the pit is located is turned toward the Sun, a broad beam of the terrific radiance of the nearby solar orb stabs through the opening and lights up the whole interior of the satellite. To the native Vulcanians, this Beam is the source of life as the Sun itself is to us.

Since Vulcan rotates on its own axis each twenty hours, it has a night of some hours in which the pit is turned away from the Sun so that the Beam cannot enter. The Beam is brightest, of course, when the Pit exactly faces the Sun. That is noon, in the hollow world. But before and after that noon, the Beam is able to enter the pit obliquely so that there are several hours of daylight, in all.

Upon the hemisphere of the *inner* world, opposite the Pit, there is a broad band of territory called the Hot Belt. This is none other than the path followed by the Beam across the inner face of Vulcan.

Each 'morning', when the Beam first obliquely enters the hollow world, it strikes the opposite inner face at one end of this so-called Hot Belt.

As the Beam angles slowly due to the turning of the little world on its axis, it travels like a moving searchlight along the fixed path across the inner face. The concentrated radiance of the Beam, of course, is of such terrific heat as to destroy any life, and no living thing can exist in the path of the Beam.

Strange Life Forms

It is fortunate, however, that Vulcan does turn on its axis. The gravitation of the Sun is immensely powerful at this close proximity. It is so

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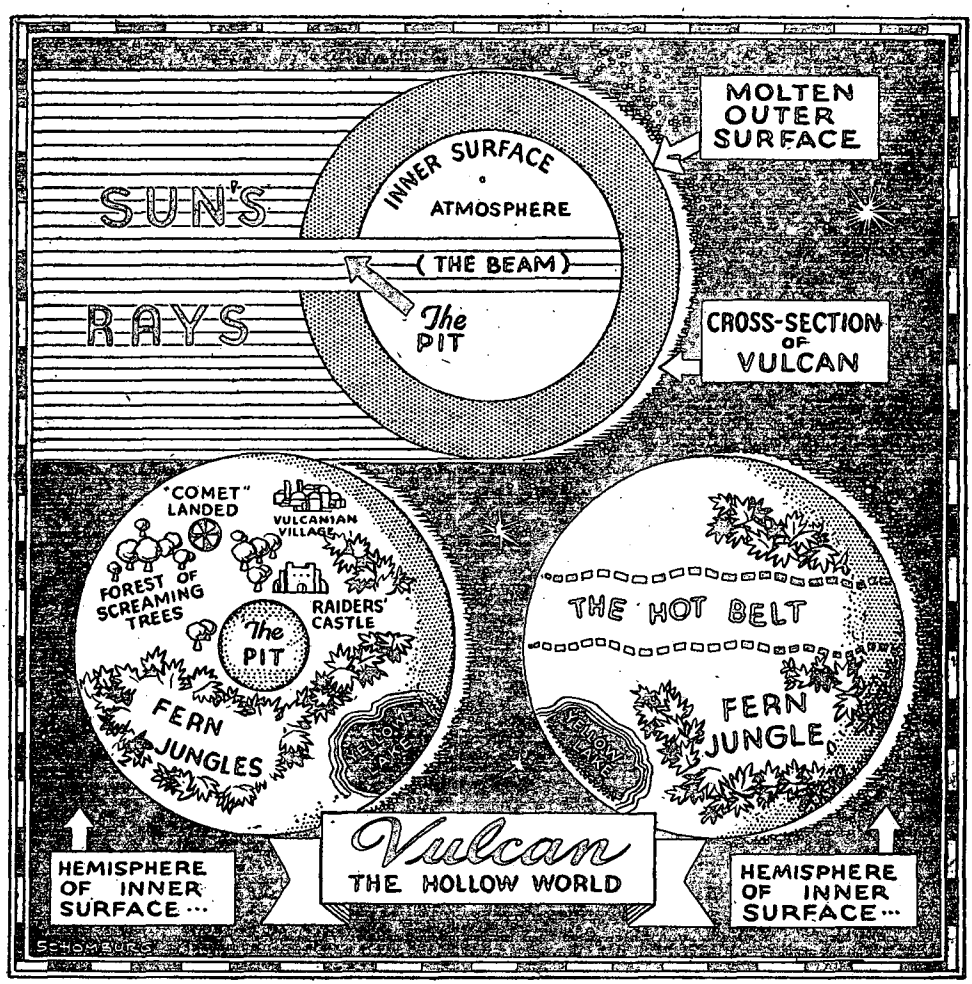
powerful that it would soon strip off any atmosphere on the outside face of the satellite, if there were any. And it would also in time draw the atmosphere out of the hollow world, if the Pit always faced toward the Sun so that the atmosphere could escape in that direction.

But since the Pit only *directly* faces the Sun for the few minutes of noon each day, the mighty pull of the solar orb is cheated of its prey. For the atmosphere of the hollow world, being



trapped inside its shell, cannot be drawn away by the Sun as would otherwise be the case.

Considering its possession of air, water, warmth and light, it is not surprising that during the course of the ages, many strange forms of life evolved into being in the hollow world. What is more surprising is the presence of human inhabitants.

Inhabitants Still Barbarians

We know that these Vulcanians, as scientists generally have now agreed to call them, did not originate in the hollow world. It is quite certain that they came from the same ancient human stock that long ago in dim pre-history colonized all the planets of our Solar System.

This is proved by the language of the Vulcanians, which is a definite variant of the ancient Denebian language. Every other human planetary language of which we have knowledge has the same root of the Denebian tongue.

Millions of years ago, it was pioneering men from the distant star Deneb who colonized Earth, Mars, Venus and all the other planets, as well as the worlds of numerous other stars in our galaxy. Now we realize that some of those daring colonists penetrated even inside the hollow world Vulcan, and set up a colony there.

The fall of the Denebian inter-stellar empire was followed on nearly every world by a retrogression toward barbarism. It was so on Earth, on Mars, on all the rest. And it seems to have been so inside Vulcan. The Vulcanians, however, never fought their way back up to a scientific civilization as the men of Earth finally did in the 19th to 25th centuries. The Vulcanians remained in semi-barbarism, isolated from the rest of the System, not even knowing that the rest of the System existed.

These barbaric descendants of a civilized race

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worshiped the Beam, which alone made life possible inside the hollow world. They believed that they occupied the only hollow space in the universe, and that all the rest of the cosmos was solid.

Much has been written, since the Futuremen's epochal adventure inside Vulcan, about the fauna and flora of this amazing world. It is probable that planetary zoologists and botanists will be studying it for a long time to come, since the absolute isolation of that life from the rest of the System has developed some amazing forms.

The Screaming-trees are a form of plant life found on no other planet of the System, and have developed a truly unique method of self-protection. The mirage-monsters, as the huge and dangerous gelatinous creatures of the fern jungles are called, are almost as strange in their wonderful ability to disguise themselves when they lie in wait for prey. There are a host of other forms equally alien.

Mysterious Sun Dogs

But most intriguing of all is one utterly strange form of life which the native Vulcanians firmly assert exists. These are the so-called Sun Dogs. The natives of the hollow world describe them as radiant creatures who are able "to ride upon the sunbeams".

The Sun Dogs, claim the natives, are totally unaffected by heat, and at rare intervals enter the hollow world by flying into it in the Beam.

No planetary scientist has yet seen one of these fabulous creatures. Yet many scientists have recently soberly speculated that the so-called Sun Dogs may be a strange form of life resident in the Sun itself. Such a creature, to live in the awful solar heat and glare, would have to be far different from any form of life known to us. It would probably have a body constituted of force, rather than of ordinary matter.

If such strange creatures do inhabit our Sun, their adaptation to its environment would probably make it impossible for them to venture far from it. But they could certainly venture as far as Vulcan, and come down into the interior along the Beam. It may be that some day they will be observed and studied. Meanwhile, Vulcan still guards this last and greatest of its mysteries.

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THE FUTUREMEN

(Continued from page 76)

"You see?" Grag said. "I just gave him a mental command to come to me, and he did."

A Destructive Pet

Captain Future was interested. "Then the moon-hounds must communicate with each other telepathically. I never thought of that, but it's quite logical, when you think of it, that they'd evolve such a faculty on a soundless world."

Grag's discovery enabled him to complete the taming of Eek in short order. The little moon-pup appeared able to sense Grag's mental commands, even at a comparatively great distance. And Grag was inordinately proud of his accomplishments, and of Eek's devotion to him.

Unfortunately, Eek still retained his worst vice, that of eating up any scrap of metal upon which he could fasten his teeth. He preferred silver and copper, but would take anything that was metallic. Time after time, he wreaked havoc by his uncontrollable appetite.

What was even more unfortunate, Eek always seemed to choose Otho's weapons, instruments and various other metal possessions for his depredations. The android reached a higher pitch of indignation with each new foray.

"Grag is doing it!" Otho acused. "He's putting the idea into that moon-pup's head to gnaw at my belongings."

"I've done nothing of the kind," Grag declared. "You're always picking on Eek."

Their arguments raged incessantly. And finally, Eek capped the climax.

Eek's Last Chance

The Futuremen had to make a rush trip to Venus, and during their absence, Grag left his pet locked in a storeroom with an ample supply of ore-bearing rock for food. But apparently, it had not been ample enough for Eek.

When they returned, they discovered that during their absence Eek had gnawed through the cement wall of the room, got into the main laboratory, and eaten most of the copper parts of their biggest cyclotron. When they entered, the moon-pup was found sprawled beside the ruined cyc in an unparalleled state of intoxication.

"That settles it," Captain Future declared with finality. "Eek has got to go."

Grag made a desperate appeal.

"Give him one more chance, chief. I can break him of this habit, in a little more time."

Curt relented a little.

"Grag, I'll give you one more month. If by that time, Eek hasn't reformed, he's definitely leaving."

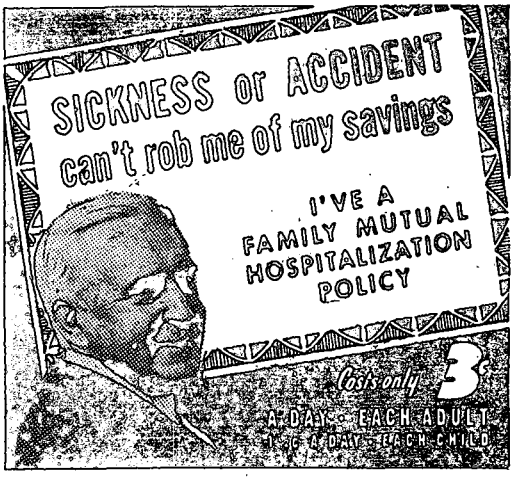
"I'll work every minute of that month, training him," Grag said earnestly.

Hall of Enemies

But chance, and the machinations of a certain powerful interplanetary criminal, destined otherwise.

The criminal in question was Cole Romer, the Earthman whose amazing plot to bluff the System into a reign of terror broke that very day. The call for the Futuremen's aid came within the next two hours.

[*Turn page*]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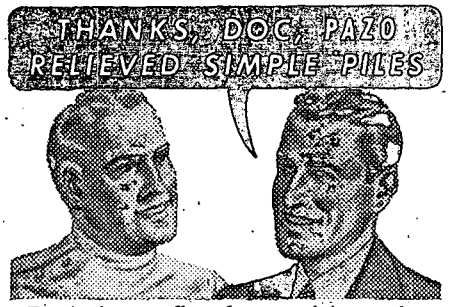

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When they answered that urgent call for help, Grag took Eek with them in the Comet. But in the days of extreme hardship, danger and struggle that followed, he had no chance to give Eek any attention.

The course of that struggle of the Futuremen with Cole Romer has been described elsewhere. The climax of that great duel came on one of the moons of Pluto, where Cole Romer's forces captured the Futuremen.

Romer maintained upon that moon what he called his Hall of Enemies. It was a room of his stronghold in which were several dozens of hermetically-sealed glassite cases. In each case sat one of Cole Romer's captives—paralyzed in strange suspended animation by a subtle gas which froze the metabolism of every living cell, holding them in living death.

Into this dreaded Hall of Enemies, Cole Romer brought the captured Futuremen and Joan Randall. Each of them was thrust into one of the glassite cases. Each case was hermetically sealed, and then the freezing-gas was released in each.

A Living Corpse

Curt Newton, Joan, Simon and Otho, became so many living statues. Sitting there in the prisoning case, Captain Future was unable to move a muscle. Even his breathing was halted, his whole body's metabolism paralyzed. He could only stare straight ahead, like the others. And the most horrible feature was that he was still fully conscious.

Cole Romer laughed as he left them.

"It's worse than death, isn't it, Future?" he taunted. "You will sit like that, unchanging, for years and years."

The misery of their fate was enough to bring madness to a lesser man. Never, in all his hazardous career, had Captain Future been caught in a predicament that seemed so hopeless.

He could not even turn his head. He could only stare fixedly across the shadowy, silent Hall of Enemies whose only other occupants were the other frozen, conscious captives, each in his own sealed case.

Nor was there hope from outside. Romer's forces ruled this moon. Grag had been disabled and left for dead by the criminal's men. He lay on the floor, his electrical "nerves" severed by an atom-blast.

Hours went by in which Captain Future fought off madness. Then, he saw a small, gray creature creep fearfully into the shadowy Hall.

Skeptical Moon-Dog

It was Eek. The moon-pup, lonely for Grag, had followed them to this place. Eek now pawed distressedly at the unconscious robot.

Captain Future had a wild idea. "That moon-pup! It might help—"

Curt only had one power left—the power of thought. He used it now.

He knew that Grag could give Eek telepathic orders. He tried it now himself, projecting a concentrated thought at the moon-pup.

"Here, Eek!" he thought. "Come here!"

The moon-pup turned and looked at him. Then it came doubtfully over to the glassite case in which Captain Future sat rigidly frozen.

Curt hurled another thought at the strange

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little creature. "There is silver in the wall of this case, Eek. Silver!"

Now if there was one metal that Eek loved even better than copper as food, it was silver. The beady eyes of the moon-pup glistened, and he advanced and sank his teeth into the corner of the glassite case.

He retreated a moment later, and spat out a mouthful of broken chips of glassite. He looked up at Captain Future reproachfully.

Curt redoubled his telepathic effort. "You did not bite deep enough to get the silver, Eek!" he thought. "Bite deeper! You will find luscious silver, all you can eat!"

A little distrustfully now, Eek again advanced and started chewing on the corner of the case. His jewel-hard teeth gnawed into the glassite.

Again, after a few moments, he turned away. And this time he turned his back on Captain Future, with the injured air of one who had been deceived.

To the Rescue

But his teeth had penetrated the thick glassite wall of the case, this time! The freezing-gas started to escape singingly through the tiny aperture. And as it escaped, and was replaced by air, Captain Future felt life come back into his paralyzed limbs.

In a minute more, he was breaking out of the case and freeing the others. Swiftly, they repaired Grag's severed nerves and brought the robot back to life.

By the time their captors received the alarm, the Futuremen had freed all the other prisoners in the Hall of Enemies. And the battle that followed sealed the doom of Cole Romer.

Not until after that climactic struggle, did Curt Newton have time to relate to Grag how Eek had freed them. And Grag seemed to swell with pride when he heard.

Applause for Eek

"Didn't I tell you Eek was smart?" Grag cried. "You won't make me give him up now, will you, chief?"

Curt shook his head. "Grag, Eek is a pest. He's a thief, a drunk, and a good bit of a coward. But, for what he did today, Eek gets my okay for life."

Otho groaned. "Do you mean that I'll have to put up with that miserable little critter from now on? Life won't be worth living."

"Otho is merely jealous because he doesn't have a pet like Eek," Grag commented loftily.

Otho swore. "When *I* get myself a mascot, it'll be one that has a few brains—and one that will be able to beat Eek into a pulp!"

How Otho carried out that promise, and how the advent of his mascot Oog brought complications, is another story. That lay in the future. For the present, Grag was at last completely happy. Eek had justified himself.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

As for what I thought of the rest of the mag:

AFTERMATH was readable, vaguely interesting. I think that if everything evolved evenly everything would remain the same in relation to everything else; hence no problem at all from the algae, or anything else. Get it? Oh, well, just an idea.

INCIDENT ON CALYPSO was *good*. Need more, much more, like this.

Hall of Fame Story—another good one. It lived up to its title for once. Seemed unusually well written and had a very affective ending, to me at least.

TROUBLE ON TRITON—I knew what was going to happen all the time. No comment.

Inside illustrations—the best was Orban's on page 57. You have ruined Orban's style by having him use white scratchy lines on black so much. This is more noticeable in the fall TWS than in STARTLING, but it is bad anyway. When he does work for other mags he does not use that style. Marchioni is not bad on page 67; he is awful on page 75, but the worst ones are for the novel. Kick that fellow out.

THE ETHER VIBRATES—almost all the letters mentioned how good last issue's cover was—why the change back to normal this time? That doesn't even seem very smart, does it?

I have a lot I'd like to say yet, but this is too long as is.—*429 College Avenue, Storm Lake, Iowa.*

You've said plenty already, brother astrogator. Snaggie, old tooth, roll out another Xeno bomb—the perfumed sort to rid the community of Storm Lake of the real source of the stench—a certain mad fan letter writer with an infinitely poisoned pen. Incidentally, the abovementioned Professor spells his name C-O-L-O-N-N-A with two (count 'em, 2) N's. Most reasonable guess is that he is taking off in *Sonny Boy*, or perhaps, *Please*, and that this is the true cause of the devastation behind him.

IT GETS WOES AND WOES

By Gus Dallas

Sarge, old proton ring: Everyone is no doubt wondering about the drastic change that seems to have come over Earl K. Bergey, BEMaster. First a spaceship cover, then the complete abolition of the gal-guy-goon triangle affair from stfiction mag covers. And on the cover of the Fall SS we have no hero, heroine, BEM or spaceship, but merely a bewildered gal stumbling toward us, with a fellow bearing an amazing resemblance to Jerry Colona close behind. The city in the back ground was excellent, at any rate.

As for the mysterious change that's come over BEMaster Bergey, I can offer but one theory. That some exasperated fan invented a mind-transformer machine and switched minds with Bergey. Or maybe he merely made a controlled zombie of artist Bergey. Anyway, my heartiest congratulations and wishes for success to whoever caused this astounding switchover. However, I hope Bergey manages to sneak in a BEM perhaps once a year, but only one!! And an original one!

The rest of the pics in the mag were poor, with Marchioni taking low honors, to be followed by Morey. Best by a wide margin was Orban's (?) for Leinster's little epic.

The stories. Hah! The shorts had it all over the novel. Novel? I don't get it, Sarge, only 40 pages?? Hmm. Well, so what, if all the novels are as odious as AFTERMATH, make 'em short. Very much so. Yeah.

As I was saying, best story in the Fall ish was Murray Leinster's INCIDENT ON CALYPSO. I like Leinster's stuff. He works on cosmic scope and stuff like that there. He doesn't mess around with puny little solar systems or only one or two planets. That's old stuff. I'm for galactic empires and inter-galactic warfare. Yeah. Very futuristic.

Second best was Ed Hamilton's TROUBLE ON TRITON. Tritonians were very impressive creatures. So were the Livies, in a revolting sort of way. Incidentally, when will Livies become popular around this era?

Third best story was the classical reprint, *The Superman of Dr. Jukes*. Quite confusing. I couldn't get the

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characters straight. Thot Jukes was a money-mad scientist. Then I thought the Secretary of War was a foreign agent. I discovered he was a U. S. Secretary, and then was startled to find he was a fake? What goes? I do!

Fourth was the misnamed novel, *Aftermath*. Boo! Yes. No other comment.

Now for the vibrating ether. The reader speaks, yeah, but what does he say? Not a thing. 'Tis quite a dull department you've got there, Sarge. No blood, no war, no blazing ray-gats. And those puns you head the letters with. . . . Ghad! How *puny!* I feel like *pun*ishing you with a *punch* in the nose. *'pun* my word, wasn't that cute? Oh, well, you know the old saying: "The pun is mightier than the sword!"

Best letters: Perry, Oliver, Barford, Friedman.

I see Cap Future is returning in the next ish, this time guided by the pen of Ed Hamilton. What happened to Brett Sterling? Come to think of it, who is—was—Brett Sterling? Appearing out of nowhere, he writes better novels than Hamilton, then vanishes, without having written a single other story. Or did he?

As for Cap Future, I think he's pretty good. What would this planet be without that gallant hero, that saviour of the solar system, striking swiftly at space scallions and smashing sinister scientists striving to subjugate the stars and the sun? Pooey to those who don't like Cap Future; piffle to B. Perry and pffft to J. Kennedy. 'ray for the intrepid Captain. And, oh, yea, Grag and Otho, too.

Incidentally, Sarge, who is Brett Sterling? If you don't answer this question, at least, I'll send in more drawings of you-all. But definitely.

Well, I've reached the end of my manila hemp, and I don't seem to have much more to say. Cheerful thot, eh sarge? But never fear, while there's a SS and TWS I'll forever be waving. Yes indeed.—*6615 Lawnview Avenue, Cleveland 3, Ohio.*

Fan craves BEM—this is news indeed, Froggy. Fetch me my Xeno, and forward some to the Professor's press-agent on Terra. Does no one but this old space dog know how his name is spelt? All in all, 'tis tawdry stuff from the galactic-minded Dallas. The dallas yet, eh, Wart-ears? To find out the truth about Brett Sterling, you'll have to catch the Serge in person in a Xeno-belching mood. Right now he needs more Xeno. Finis Dallas. On to the next foolish pee-lot!

TWO HEADS NOW!

By Ron Christensen

Mah Sahge: As Ignatz Phlub once said: "Harrumph." Oh, well, I'm here already and nobody can do anything about it, so why bother with introductions? Proceed.

Enclosed is a copy of my publication, ERGERZERP of which there are still two free first copies left. Interested fen please write for them?!!

Since everyone is suggesting ways for improving TWS and SS, I may as well join in the (heh heh) fun.

Why don't you conserve vital colored ink for the war effort? Print all of your covers in black but use black paper also. That way you can print all the BEMS and FEMS you want without anybody complaining.

For the insides of your mags. use super-thin tissue paper. Then war-worker-fen can get to their jobs quicker by reading the whole mag in the time it used to take to read one page. But the fen would see right through that scheme.

Many readers commented on the rocket ship on a recent SS cover. Are they sure it wasn't some new kind of BEM?

Sorry to hear that the SASFA has disintegrated. What are the main causes, H. E.?

Hath ye Sarge heard my poetry yet? Ah, then hearken.

Ye Sarge, he sits in swivel chair,
Of all conscience he is devoid.
He's reading letters to his mag
On some lonely asteroid.
He grunts and flips a page to see
If Chad and JK are there.
And if they are, which is almost sure,
He beats his two heads on the chair.

That shall go down with the works of Rumplefoot, Dinklehoofer and Schpoof.

The curtain comes down with the villain silently

[*Turn page*]

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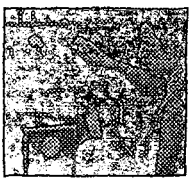

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slinking away down the path with a bedraggled copy of SS in his hands. The band plays "Oh Dem Golden Flippers."—*1870 East 33 Street, Brooklyn 10, New York.*

Roll out the Xeno, Snag, the Sarge is beat,
Such rude opinions jar him to the core—
He leans back in his easy chair,
And musters up the strength to read some more.

The Grulzak catcher's fallen in the Snorb,
And wallows there with incoherent glunt—
The Sarge has taken all he can absorb,
And looks around him for a weapon blunt

To wreak upon his plaguers vengeance true,
That will return them to the maw of Ghu.

What's that, Frogeyes—you didn't know Ghu had a mother? Heh, heh—that's very Ghud indeed. Tell Kiwi Christensen that we've taken excellent care of his ERGERZERP in the Fanzine Review. Next letter!

BLUE SERGE
By Ross Burgess

Dear Serge: Oh Boy, Oh Boy, Oh Boy!

One moment while I blow my top.

Now that I've regained my senses I'll settle down to a mere boil and give youse my opinion on the Fall SS. In fact, it was very startling. The cover. As long as Bergey gives covers like that one I'll never squeal about them. Not the dame. It was the art. Looked like a photo. Turn to page 11.

This is where the "Oh Boys" started.

Aftermath is one of the best and most unusual sf stories I've ever read. The illus were perfect. This deserves a place as one of the great Hall of Fame Classics.

Turn to page 57.

Incident on Calypso. Good but rather incidental.

Turn to page 66.

This classic was better than the latest two published. Seemed more plausible.

Trouble on Triton. Troublesome till the action starts. Then it gets interesting.

By the way. Why don't you kick out John "Hollow World" Carstairs and give us more Capt. Future. I'll be glad to see Curt Newton back.

Another by the way. Do youse make your own Xeno. (The capital was a mistake.) Or do you get the stuff —pardon me—the xeno already bottled, or kegged, or somethin'?

This is just the first of many.—*South Mills, North Carolina.*

That's what ye Sarge was afraid of, Kiwi Burgess. First of many indeed, and you seek space by childish enthusiasm and purveying of soft words! Ye Sarge is no easy mark—not to people that make him out a blue serge lint collector and than make him turn the pages so fast. As for the Xeno (capital X, Rosso!), bottles are for babies. What this old astrogator calls a barrel would pass for a hogshead on Terra. Oh, puny Earthlings!

STORM AND STREIFF
By Lee "TeLis" Streiff

Hello operator: Long distance to New York, to Sergeant Saturn—huh? Oh money—reverse the charges ——Bzzzz——Hi, Sarge. What's that?? You want my opinion on the Fall issue of STARTLING STORIES? Well I'm just going into the drug store to get it. Let's see, "Summer stories," "Silly stories," "Shuttle stories." Ah here we are STARTLING—eekkkkkk, that cover. Take it away!

Really Sarge is that cover supposed to depict a part of the story? And those colors, I shudder even to think about them. A yellow sky and as it says just as plain as day on page 42, Quote, "Darkening clouds of

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bird life in serene, pale blue skies," end quote.

Now the stories—

Trouble on Triton.....30 little men
Aftermath .....25 little men
Incident on Calypso.....20 little men
The Superman of Dr. Jukes.....½ little men

THE SUPERMAN OF DR. JUKES' plot was good, writing terrible!—*548 N. Delrose, Wichita 6, Kans.*

So you don't like yellow skies, Lee. Didn't you ever hear Irving Berlin's song on same? Silly lyric anyway, but a long-lived popular success, so some people must like 'em yellow. And anyway, what's startling about blue skies? And isn't this magazine, if nothing else, supposed to be STARTLING? Pardon ye Sarge's becoming personal, but what in Plutonian Hades does that "TeLis" in the equatorial region of your cognomen stand for? TeLis to the Marines perhaps? Enough of such quibbling and on with the debacle, Snaggletooth!

THE IRE-ISH IN HIM

By Ron Anger

Dear Sgt . . . Ah . . Neptune . . no . . . Pluto? . . . AH, Saturn, that's it!

Well, I guess I better get this gripe off my chest right at the start even if he *does* quit reading at the sixth sentence!

In buying STARTLING and stf mags in general, you are confronted with a highly complex problem. The general procedure is to flick a quick glance while no one is looking (Just to see it really *is* the latest STARTLING). Then, furtively, while pretending to be studying something you whisk it under your coat and, this accomplished, walk nonchalantly as possible to the cashier's desk.

The coat is opened just enough for the price to be seen and then, just as success seems within reach, some little old lady usually taps you on the shoulder and says, in a kindly voice, "Now, Now! A nice young man like you shouldn't be buying magazines like THAT!"

You then mumble a hurried answer, dash for the nearest moving streetcar and lean back in the seat in a cold sweat.

Oh, for the good old days of the Summer Ish!!!!

Once home and back to normal from this ordeal, I will try to analyze this ish in my own egotistical way.

First the cover: Oh well, it's not really too bad, but the costumes of the women of the cover and the inside illustration don't match. Why not get together, fellas???

Inside ills struck me as being pretty good. Why not let the artists sign them? Is Bergey a teacher's pet??

Now here goes for the stories:

1. INCIDENT ON CALYPSO . . . Leinster can always be counted on for good stf. 'This was even better than usual.

2. TROUBLE ON TRITON . . . *Good!* I liked the "Livie" angle. Ed Hamilton is just about the only writer than can turn out both stf and fantasy and be good at both.

3. AFTERMATH . . . Not bad but unconvincing.

4. THE SUPERMAN OF DR. JUKES. . . . How did this get into the Hall of Fame?? Strikes me that the H of F isn't up to scratch although it's a swell idea.

TEV was superb as usual and the other depts. so-so.

I bet by this time he's stopped reading long ago. . . Darn 'im anyway!! . . . Down with editors!!. . . . Maybe he did read it at that. . . hmmmmmnnnn. . . Oh well.—*520 Highland Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario.*

Wart-ears, get this maple leafer—perhaps he'd better turn over a new one. He thinks he can pan ye world's—nay, ye galaxy's most magnificent editorial contribution and then be kissed by the Sarge for a little of the good old Arcturean oil. No kiwi unrugged enough to be disturbed by old lady descendants (doubtless of the pterodactyl or some other early saurian) should be allowed to have the wherewithal to make the purchase price. Let them be condemned to fenswapping.

[*Turn page*]

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We like 'em rugged or at least carpeted. And while we're on the carpet, Omar, we *liked* the Jukes yarn. Otherwise we wouldn't have run it. Amen!

CHEER FROM THE BRONX

By Irwin Friedman

Dear Sarge: I have just finished the Fall SS. Thanks for putting my letter first, but I *didn't* like the heading you gave it. G-rrrrr. You David Copperfield, you Pickwick Papers, you Christmas Carol! In case you don't know, I'm giving you the Dickens. No, Sarge, not that, I didn't mean it. No no, stop it, aaaaagh.

(The scene: The same.
The time: Two weeks later.)

Well, I'm glad I recuperated in time to finish this letter, (although the Sarge probably hasn't). My doctor just managed to pull me through with that wonderful, stupendous, amazing, miraculous drug, Xeno.

Now, passing from the ridiculous to the moronic, we turn to the pics. First, we take the cover. No. On second thought, you'd better take it. It's too disgusting. On the last issue, Bergey did a very good cover. But it couldn't last. Back we go to crazy-colored skies. Back we go to underdressed and overdressed gals and guys (*in that order*).

Now for the inside pics. The one on page 15 was excellent except that the men are dressed like two of the Three Musketeers and the one on the left looks like an ape. The one for TROUBLE ON TRITON on page 75 was all right except that in the story, it mentions that the hero of the Livie wears a helmet during the show to pick up what he feels, sees, etc., but in the picture he doesn't have one. Kst, kst, kst. (See above for explanation.)

The best pic was by Marchioni for the Hall of Fame story on page 67. Idle query: Who drew the ones on pages 57 and 75?

Now for the stories. In order of preference they are:

1. INCIDENT ON CALYPSO—Good. (I'm feeling lenient today.)

2. TROUBLE ON TRITON—Fair. If this is typical of Edmond Hamilton, Im *not* looking forward to OUTLAW WORLD.

3. THE SUPERMAN OF DR. JUKES—Fair. Not worthy of Hall of Fame.

4. AFTERMATH—Rotten. All through the story, Bax kept saying, "I will get a wonderful inspiration from the gods and save everyone. Just wait." That does sound a little corny to say the least. I'd call it hammy, but I don't have enough red points. Also, it seems as if atomic power was discovered in 1944, but a few months later, V-E Day came. Since it was discovered at a time that is now the past, it weakens the story. The story would have been more realistic if the Japs were to have discovered it. Who knows, maybe the Japs *will* discover it in the near future? See what I mean?

Last, but not least, comes THE ETHER VIBRATES. Shorter than usual, but still good. After all that fuss made over *two Joe Kennedys, here is another* idle query: quote: "Where are they?" unquote. Betty Barford explains the orange sky on the Spring SS by mentioning that Roo was a red planet.

The planet known as Terra, in the Solar System, with its sun named Sol, is, where the land is barren, brownish in color, and where there is vegetation and ocean, greenish in color. But the sky is blue when viewed from there. Therefore, according to Miss Barford's theory, Terra has an illogically colored sky. If she wants to protect Bergey (and frankly, I think its time someone did) she had better do a better job of it.

Hey, I just realized. Looking over my back issues of SS, *I noticed something about them. Two consecutive issues without BEMs on the covers, not one.* Gee, this is unbelievable. Quick, call up Ripley. Bergey, what has happened to you?

Before I forget, please tell me, Sarge, if and how I can get a copy of the FANCYCLOPEDIA.

I'm looking forward to Howard Gabriel's answer to my previous letter in this issue. And Sarge, if you give this letter as insulting a title as you did the last one, I'll start writing to TWS also, and that I know you couldn't stand. I have a few choice missles ready now, just in case, so you better watch yourself.

I don't have much left to say. (Isn't this enough?) In fact, I don't have anything left to say except that if Joe Kennedy (the original) doesn't come back, you're going to lose a lot of readers.

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I guess I'll have to say so long now. So long.—*215 McClellan Street, Bronx 56, New York.*

All right, Kennedy or Kennedys. Come back, all is forgiven. So now Xeno is a drug and ye Sarge, on top of his other troubles, is a cokey Joe. Oh woe! As for the pic on page 75, that was by Marchioni too. Orban did the famous 57 honors.

For FANCYCLOPEDIA data, write Sergeant Forrest J. Ackerman, 236½ North New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, California. He published the darned amazing thing, Ye Sarge has no idea of its current price, so better drop him a line before enclosing etc. As for your Joyce Kilmerish preoccupation with trees, kiwi, since when do they have them in Pieter Bronck's back yard. Only NYC borough known to have one is—you guessed it—Brooklyn, birthplace of Noel Coward. And regarding your remarks about atomic power—where've you been? Oh! forgot. Your letter was written before the big news broke!

SLAM FROM SEATTLE
By Charles J. Sanders

Dear Sarge: I think your feature "The Ether Vibrates" is good, but could be better.

One way of improving it is by cutting out the double talk—it spoils it; another way is by leaving out some of the Joe Kennedy's although some people would miss him (He slings double talk better than you. Ahem!).

"Red Sun of Danger" in the Spring Issue was good, but the picture was corny on page 13. The cover was good, but Grag was supposed to have scratches on his tin hide but I certainly couldn't find any in the picture—even with a magnifying glass.

By the way, in the summer of 1943, Worlds of Tomorrow, Brett Sterling wrote about the Linids and the Kangas. Is there a possibility that he may write about them again in the future Captain Futures?—*Seattle, Washington.*

Too many buts, Snaggy, old tooth. Let's have another keg of Xeno and just forget all about it. And who's dishing the double around here anyway? Not ye Sarge, he never did get the knack of bratling the snurdlu bracaciously.

NOW IT'S KISSES!
By Bill Deutsch

Dear Sarge: I thought it was just about time to break my long silence. (This is my first letter to SS). O, Sarge that cover! Why did you do it? After the summer cover I thought that Bergey had reformed. Guess not. Lets have some more like the summer one.

The stories—Aftermath wasn't so bad. Seven jugs of Xeno. Incident on Calypso—above average, but not Leinster's best. Six jugs. Superman of Dr. Jukes—average, five jugs.

Trouble on Triton—good (seven jugs) but a few errors. Since Triton is the satellite of Neptune, it would be frozen stiff. Dusty plain, muddy swamp, phooey. Also when Carter talked with Kur-sarr, he spoke the Tritonion language. How would the listeners know what he said? And the atmosphere would be about nil.

I'm looking forward to the Captain Future tale next issue. The Ether Vibrates is usually the best part of your filthy rag. All in all, your mag is one of the best on the market today. Love and Kisses—*1001 W. Gilbert, Muncie, Ind.*

Well, that winds us up for the nonce—get that, Wart-ears!—and the hatches are battened, the Xeno bombs primed for Alameda. No, Kiwi Rehm, nothing is forgotten or forgiven in this party. We're off for the land of the golden bears and will be seeing you again on the return journey. Awaaaaaaay!!!

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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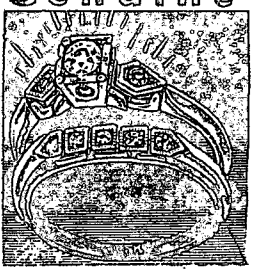

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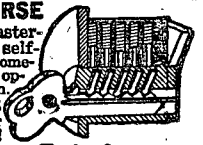

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REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By

SERGEANT SATURN

THE A list of amateur science fiction magazines is down to nine publications this time 'round, which is a trifle off the usual pace, but not at all a bad showing for the hot weather. Notable additions are two issues of an ornate publication called CANADIAN FANDOM, which originates in Toronto under the guidance of one "Beak" Taylor. We're putting the Beak in quotes hopefully. Another new arrival which seems to have

sneaked its way into the list without truly proper credentials is a job called ROCKETS, which as you may guess is the "Official Publication of the U. S. Rocket Society."

A sad note is struck by the apparent suspension of lively SHANGRI L'AFFAIRS, house organ of the LASFS for lo, these many years, and an invariably spritely and amusing one, even in its most acrimonious moments. Say it ain't so, denizens of South Bixel Street. And if it ain't, for Pete's sake send the Sarge his copies.

The B list is as B as ever.

ACOLYTE, 1005 West 35th Place, Los Angeles, 7, California. Co-editors, F T. Laney & S. D. Russell. Published quarterly, 15c per copy.

Belongs at the top of the list for more than alphabetical reasons. Fritz Lieber in especially good form with a lengthy but absorbing dream fantasy, with Rimel, E. Hoffman Price, Laney and many others doing their distinguished bits. A fine issue even if Tigrina does insist all its readers have vampire blood. What gives, Tigrina?

CANADIAN FANDOM, 9 MacLennan Avenue, Toronto, Ontario. Editor, Beak Taylor. 5c per copy, 6 copies 25c.

Fair to middling muddle with one Leslie A. Croutch coming up out of same to dominate fiction and departments of two issues received. J. R. Gray of the Los Angeles Grays sneaked into the Canadian lineup somehow. Kinda heavy.

CHANTICLEER, 25 Poplar, Battle Creek, Michigan. Editor, Walt Liebscher. 15c per copy.

Very amusing this time, especially in the light poetry department, particularly in "Red Tape" by anonymous. Book review section still the best in all fandom.

FANTASTICONGLOMERATION, Box 6475 Metro Station, Los Angeles, California. Editor, Weaver Wright. 5c per copy.

This really belongs on the B list, but since it's up here and is the first time we've taken a crack at it, let it stay. A flimsy sheet containing second-best efforts of most of the Los Angeles regulars.

FANTASY COMMENTATOR, 19 East 235th

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Street, New York 66, New York. Editor, A. Langley Searles. 20c per copy, 6 copies $1.00.

Good issue this time if you like heavyweight stf speculation and theorizing. Thyril Ladd and Malcolm Jameson head a good cast of eastern writers, and the reviews crowd those of CHANTICLEER at the tape.

ROCKETS, 469 Duane Street, Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Editor R. L. Farnsworth. Published quarterly. Yearly $4.00, three years $10.00.

An ambitious rocket mag—look at those subscription fees!—with writings by practically every rocketeer, dead or alive, since the days of Leonardo da Vinci with the notable exception of Willy Ley. Also diagrams of rockets, etc. Okay for rocket zanies.

SHANGRI L'AFFAIRES, LASFS Clubroom, 637½ South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Charles Burbee.

Hope this isn't the final ish. It's up to snuff with Harry Warner, fra Croutch (twice—he do get around!), Tigrina, Laney, etc., cutting their usual amusing capers, along with Tucker, Searles and Warner. Give us mo', please.

UTOPIA, 2721 16th Street, Everett, Washington. Editor, Charles McNutt.

Ron Clyne has a field day with one of his ornately effective Atlantean covers, and a tissue-covered something inside. Contributors include Bill Watson, Duane Rimel, the Dunk, Warner, Bok, Derleth and—no! It can't be!—Croutch. All in all a distinguished and versatile newcomer on the fanzine scene. May it come again often and soon.

VOM, Box 6475 Metro Station, Los Angeles 55, California. Editor, Sergeant Forrest J. Ackerman. 15c per copy, 7 issues $1.00.

Still far and away the best fan letter discussion sheet of them all, despite a rather alarming tendency to go in heavily for memorabilia of weddings, deaths and the like. Don't go folksy on your covers, fellow-Sarge—not after the more "interesting" rep you have built up. Please!

Ye Sarge should have given UTOPIA more of a play. It's strictly a big-time new fanzine. Maybe some of you fans will take up where

[*Turn page*]

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the old space dog fell down on the job. And now for the B's.

ERGERZERP, unidentified save for a Joe Kennedy rubber stamp—so that's what's happened to Joke! Well, well. If we had a Z list, this would be at its bottom. Inconsequential job.

FFF FANEWSCARD, 6401-24th Avenue, Brooklyn 4, New York. Editor, Will Sykora. No price listed. Looks okay, Will. Get it coming less seldom, do.

FANEWS, 1443 4th Avenue South, Fargo, North Dakota. Editors, Dunkelberger and Kay. 2c per copy. 13 for 25c. The mighty Dunk is still getting out his informative little chatter cards, often with pix, and a more or less weekly elaborate version. Some day Dunk is going to take the time and come up with a monthly that will rock fendom—if he'll just quit such massive quantity production.

FANTASY FICTION FIELD, 6401 24th Avenue, Brooklyn 4, New York. Published by Fanewscard. 5c per copy, 6 for 25c. The endless stf bibliography goes on and on, but see what I mean about Dunk?

FANTASY-NEWS, Box 7316, Baltimore 27, Maryland. Editor, Will Sykora. 3 issues 10c, 32 issues $1.00. Will has been having press trouble, but his little weekly newspaper of fandom continues to highlight sparse East Coast effort whenever he gets it out.

LENS, 6615 Lawnview Avenue, Cleveland 3, Ohio. Editor, G. Dallas. 5c per issue, 6 issues 25c. A strictly amateur effort, most of it by G. Dallas himself.

NIGHTMARE, 460 Orchard Street, Rahway, New Jersey. Editor, George Fox. Published quarterly. 5c per isuse. Brother! Despite a contribution by Laney, an inferior juvenile effort. Surely Fox must have a friend who draws better than that.

PSFS NEWS, only identified as the Gazette of Philadelphia Fandom, and a worthy thing indeed.

TAURUS, 48 Mill Road, Durham, New Hampshire. Editor, Albert Yeager Jr., 5c per issue, 6 issues for 25c. Joe Kennedy (so he isn't truly in an evanescent state), Boff Perry, Yeager and Dunk combine to form an amusing little booklet whose poor art work and sloppy printing are all that keeps it from the A list.

So there it is again, not good, not bad. But ye Sarge has had his fill of fanzines for the present. Roll out the Xeno, Frogeyes. We're offff!

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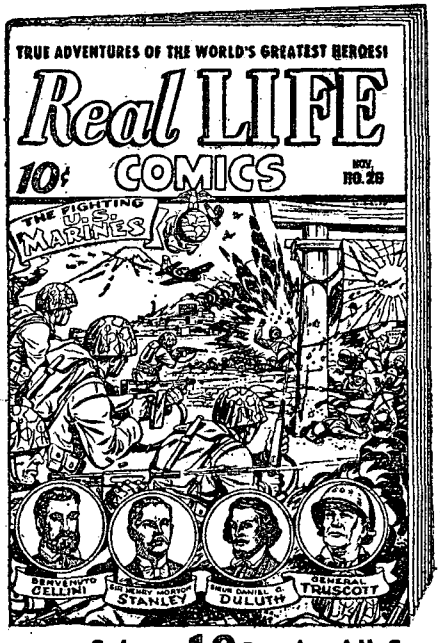

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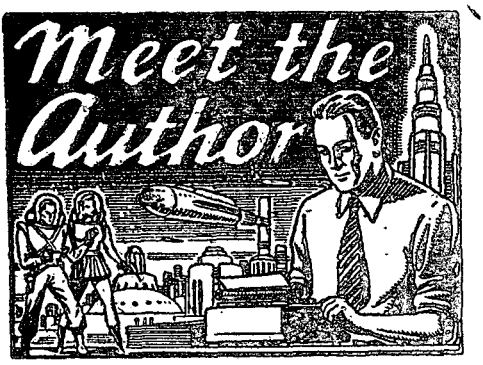

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It's good to have the original creator of Captain Future back on the job again after a term in olive drab, not only to turn out more

EDMOND HAMILTON

Curt Newtons, but to pen other pseudo-science and fantasy yarns in his inimitable style, which is never drab. In case you are wondering what a science fiction author looks like, here is a picture of the man himself. And here's what he has to say:

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On the other hand, he can give subtle, not-too-blatant hints to the effect that he is a combination of D'Artagnan, Casanova and Einstein. That will be interesting, all right. But those who read it will probably announce, "Doakes is an egotistic ass."

In an effort to steer a middle course, I will simply give a few of the vital statistics and pass to more interesting subjects. The statistics—white and unmarried and a little too old for the military, say they; some two hundred-odd published stories behind me, and I hope some more ahead.

[*Turn page*]

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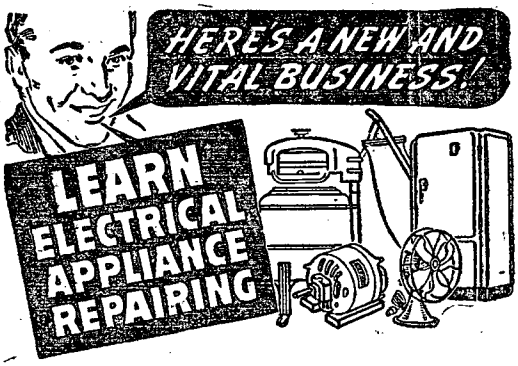

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Until the war cut off civilian travel, I knocked around a good bit between Canada and Panama. But the only place I ever went back to five times is Mexico, where my variety of Spanish always puts people in stitches and does much to further good relations between the two countries. The tragedy of my life was when the tourists discovered Acapulco and living went up from a buck and a half a day to nine dollars.

The most interesting thing about any science-fiction writer, I should think, is why he does it—why he spends year after year writing fantastic stories. And believe it or not, the answer is childishly simple. It is because the writers are science-fiction fans, and the deepest dyed fans of all.

Perhaps that statement will be challenged by some of the younger fans. I've met a lot of them across the country, I think they're swell people and I've had a lot of good times with 'em. But I've never met any who had any deeper enthusiasm for fantasy fiction than the average s-f writer.

In my own case, though it sounds like a big lie, I was an enthusiastic science fiction fan before I could read. That was way back in the halcyon times years before World War One, when H. G. Wells published an article in the old Metropolitan Magazine called "The Things that Live on Mars." I couldn't decipher the text but the fantastic illustrations got me.

Later on, I graduated to the old weekly magazines that ran occasional fantasies. Julius Unger, that indefatigable bibliophilist of science fiction, once dug up some of my own published fan-letters from those old journals and cast them in my teeth.

All that was a long time ago. I've done a lot of reading in three or four languages since then. But I will still always drop anything in my library for a new science-fiction story, and I still get as much blast out of a good one as ever.

The point that I'm trying to get over is that science-fiction writers turn out the stuff because they like it. If they didn't, they'd turn to the far easier existence of riveters or refrigerator-salesmen. And if anyone says that that would be wonderful, I here and now denounce him as a low character unworthy of fandom.

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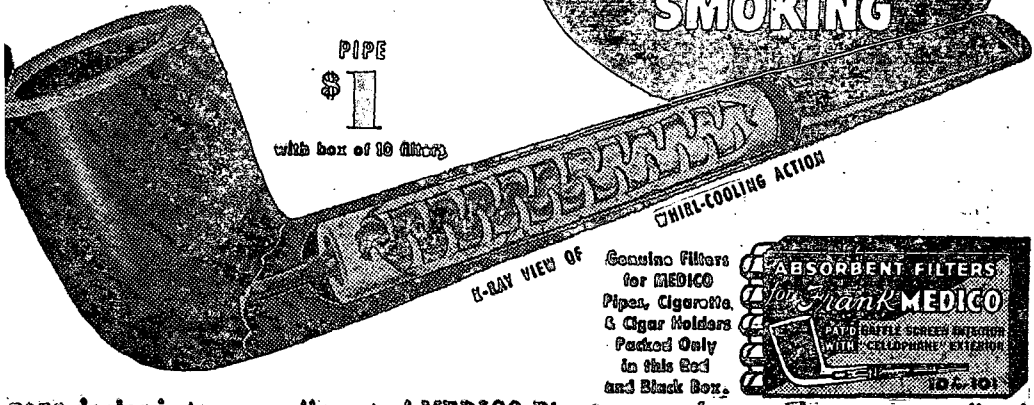

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To Grace Your Face... HALO *PEARLS

*Simulated

Imagine! A Thrillingly Lovely 16-inch

HALO *PEARL NECKLACE

With Sterling Silver Safety Clasp

YOURS FOR ONLY **$2.98** TAX INCLUDED POSTAGE PAID

A Halo String of Beauty Is a Joy Forever

There is something about a string of pearls that helps a lovely lady put her best face forward! So, if you have longed for the elusive beauty and charm which pearls inspire, and have heretofore permitted a price you couldn't afford to stand in your way of pearl ownership, you'll welcome this opportunity to acquire an exquisite Halo strand of extravagant beauty at a truly low affordable price!

A Few Pearly Words of Wisdom Why Halo Necklaces Are Preferred!

- Halo Beads Are Uniformly Perfect
- Halo Beads Are Coated with a Pearl Essence that is the Essence of Loveliness
- Halo Beads are Enduringly Lovely
- Halo Safety Clasps are Sterling Silver
- . . . and Halo Necklaces Cost No More

"Wear At Our Risk" Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction

We want you to be as proud and pleased to wear a Halo necklace as we are to have made it possible. That's why you can wear it for 5 whole days at our risk after the postman delivers yours. Then, if you are not delighted with it, if you can bear to part with it, if you can give up the praise and compliments that its wearing has brought you — simply mail it back and we will refund your money *cheerfully* — and that's a promise!

You'll say... NEVER BEFORE SO MUCH PRECIOUS BEAUTY FOR SO LITTLE COST

Flattering 1, 2 and 3 Strand Halo Necklaces with Matched Bracelets and Earrings

Ideal For Treasured Gift Giving! Halo *Pearls For All Occasions

★ 1-strand 16" Halo Necklace—Sterling Silver Clasp	$2.98
★ 2-strand 16" Halo Necklace—Sterling Silver Clasp	5.98
★ 3-strand 16" Halo Necklace—Sterling Silver Clasp	8.98
★ 2-strand Halo Choker with Velvet Ties	5.98
★ 3-strand Halo Choker with Velvet Ties	8.98
★ 2-strand Halo Bracelet—Sterling Silver Clasp	2.98
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My Total Order Amounts to $_____

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- ☐ 2-Strand 16" Halo Necklace @ 5.98
- ☐ 3-Strand 16" Halo Necklace @ 8.98
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- ☐ 3-Strand Halo Choker @..... 8.98
- ☐ 2-Strand Halo Bracelet @.....$2.98
- ☐ 3-Strand Halo Bracelet @..... 4.49
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Mark Earring Size ☐ Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large

CHECK ONE

☐ I am enclosing $_____ Send my Halo *Pearls Prepaid

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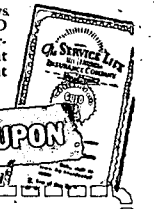

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